A Praxeological Autopsy of Theocratic Predation

Anatomy of the State:

Islamic Republic of Iran

On the Metaphysics of Domination, the Economics of Plunder,
and the Moral Imperative of Structural Dismantlement

Hamoon Soleimani

Based on the Framework of Murray N. Rothbard

2026 Edition — Revised & Expanded

"Stripped of its mythological shroud, the State reveals itself
as the sole organisation claiming a monopoly on legitimised force."

Anatomy of the State: Islamic Republic of Iran
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To the Iranian people—
who have borne the machinery of their own plunder
and in January 2026 paid for their resistance
with the only currency the regime respects:
blood.

And to every thinker who understood
that naming a thing with precision
is the first act of liberation.

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Introduction: The Mask of Divinity

"The State is that great fiction by which everyone endeavours to live at the expense of everyone else."
— Frédéric Bastiat, *The State* (1848)

Contra the sanitary fictions of civic education, which posit the State as a rational compact emerging from consent—a genealogy running from Hobbes through Locke with carefully graduated degrees of credulity—the institution stripped of ceremonial vestiture reveals itself as something both more ancient and considerably less virtuous: a mechanism of institutionalised predation that has persisted across civilisations precisely because its victims were trained to regard their chains as obligations.[1] The State is the sole organisation in any given territory claiming a monopoly on the legitimised *initiation* of force: Murray Rothbard's clinical formulation, once absorbed, cannot be unlearned, and every subsequent political analysis that fails to begin there operates with a deliberately blunted instrument.[2]

The dark alchemy of sovereignty transmutes into apparent virtue exactly those actions—theft, imprisonment, extortion—that would be unambiguously criminal when performed by any private actor.[3] The great historical achievement of the State has accordingly not been the provision of collective goods—markets and voluntary associations have furnished these wherever left to operate—but the management of public epistemology: the conversion of plunder into tribute, coercion into consent, and parasitism into statesmanship.[4]

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The Islamic Republic of Iran instantiates a unique, virulent genus of this predatory logic: a **Theological-Industrial Complex** in which the apparatus of plunder operates not merely in the name of the nation or the proletariat—the familiar collectivist fictions of the twentieth century—but in the name of the Absolute itself. Where secular despotisms demand surrender of property and political will, this regime demands the total forfeit of body, mind,

and accumulated material asset as conditions of spiritual standing. It represents the final evolutionary form of rent-seeking: a monopoly on the Gateway to Salvation, with earthly servitude as the toll.[5]

Said Amir Arjomand's authoritative analysis characterises the 1979 revolution as, above all, a revolution in the structure of religious authority itself: not a restoration of traditional Islamic jurisprudence but a hostile corporate takeover of that tradition's legitimating vocabulary, deployed to concentrate unprecedented temporal and spiritual power in a single office.[6] This reading has important analytical consequences. A political project rooted in ideology rather than authentic theological tradition is constrained not by the immovable certainties of sacred text but by the shifting sands of popular credibility—and popular credibility, as the uprisings of 2017, 2019, 2022, and the catastrophic January 2026 Massacre have demonstrated at enormous and compounding human cost, erodes with the accelerating velocity of economic destruction.[7]

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What follows is a praxeological autopsy conducted in the tradition inaugurated by Ludwig von Mises's *Human Action* and applied to political institutions most rigorously by Murray Rothbard.[8] The Austrian method's utility here is not decorative. It insists that only individuals act, that institutional arrangements survive because they serve the interests of the human beings who constitute and defend them, and that every feature of the Islamic Republic that *appears* dysfunctional—the inflation, the corruption, the intellectual exodus, the ecological annihilation—is a *rational outcome* from the perspective of the ruling coalition that captures the rents these conditions generate. Dysfunction for the many is function for the few: this is the master key to the system.

Part I dissects the metaphysical and juridical architecture through which consent is manufactured and selfhood legally abolished. Part II examines the economics of organised plunder through the IRGC's praetorian empire, the architecture of institutionalised theft, and inflation as deliberate statecraft. Part III analyses the repressive apparatus and confronts the January 2026 Massacre and its political-military aftermath directly. Part IV—*The Defence*—demolishes the three principal objections to the abolitionist case: the 1953 coup thesis, the engagement hypothesis, and the misapplication of the Non-Aggression Principle as a philosophical shield for mass murder.

The critique advanced throughout is abolitionist rather than reformist. One does not negotiate with a mechanism whose architectural logic is the predation of the very population over which it claims governance. One dissects it, names it with precision, and unmakes it.

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Notes

[1]The libertarian demolition of contract theory is conducted most rigorously in Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982), pp. 35–42, and in Lysander Spooner, *No Treason: The Constitution of No Authority* (Boston: self-published, 1870), §§ 1–3. The decisive logical objection is not that social order is impossible without the State but that the State's claim to represent a voluntary compact is empirically false and conceptually incoherent: no living generation consented to any constitution, and the theory of tacit consent through residence is, as Spooner demonstrated, indistinguishable from the logic of extortion.

[2]Rothbard's canonical definition: "The State is that organisation in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in a given territorial area; in particular, it is the only organisation in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by coercion." Murray N. Rothbard, *The Anatomy of the State* (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 1974), p. 11. The original distinction between the "political means" (forcible appropriation of others' labour) and the "economic means" (one's own productive work) derives from Franz Oppenheimer, *The State*, trans. John Gitterman (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1914), pp. 24–27.

[3]Albert Jay Nock pressed this with characteristic economy: "the State claims and exercises the monopoly of crime." Albert Jay Nock, *Our Enemy, the State* (New York: William Morrow, 1935), p. 55. Bastiat had observed the prior principle: the law is perverted when it "annihilates the justice that it was supposed to maintain." Frédéric Bastiat, *The Law*, trans. Dean Russell (Irvington-on-Hudson: Foundation for Economic Education, 1950), p. 12.

[4]Rothbard's analysis of the State's cultivation of its intellectual caste—those who provide the legitimising ideology in exchange for proximity to power—remains the definitive account. Rothbard, *Anatomy of the State*, pp. 28–41. For the economic argument that pure public goods do not require State provision, see Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1962), pp. 883–890.

[5]The theological framework for this arrangement was articulated by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in lectures delivered at Najaf in 1970, published as *Hukumat-e Islami* (Islamic Government). The text claims for the supreme jurist (*Vali-e Faqih*), during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, all the political authority of the Prophet and the Imams, including the authority to levy taxes, administer punishment, and command armies. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*, trans. Hamid Algar (Tehran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, 2002), pp. 55–80. For the doctrinal novelty of this claim within the Shi'i tradition, see Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 220–243.

[6]Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 91–100. Arjomand demonstrates that the dominant pre-revolutionary Shi'i position on political authority was quietist—senior *maraje'* holding that active clerical governance was at best a necessary evil pending the Hidden Imam's return, not a divinely mandated constitutional arrangement. Khomeini's *Velayat-e Faqih* doctrine represented a rupture with that tradition disguised as its fulfilment.

[7]The three protest waves preceding January 2026 each exhibited deepening social breadth and geographic dispersion: the December 2017–January 2018 uprising triggered by economic grievance; the November 2019 fuel-price protests (Amnesty International documented at least 1,500 killed in the crackdown); and the "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising of September 2022 following the death in IRGC custody of Mahsa Amini. Each wave was broader, more geographically uniform, and required greater state violence to suppress than the last—a trajectory that converged, as this work will demonstrate, on the eliminationist violence of January 2026.

[8]Mises defines praxeology as the general science of human action, grounded in the apodictic axiom that humans act purposefully to achieve subjectively valued ends. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1966), pp. 1–30. Rothbard's methodological application of this framework to the political sociology of the State—the anatomy of predation as a system of incentives, institutions, and ideology—is the methodological foundation of the present work.

PART I

The Metaphysics of Domination

"Sovereign is he who decides on the exception."

— Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (1922)

CHAPTER 1

The Juridical Architecture of Totalitarianism

This chapter examines how the Islamic Republic wages a systematic juridical and ontological war against the individual. First, by reclassifying the citizen as a permanent ward under Velayat-e Faqih—the most ambitious property claim over persons in modern constitutional history. Second, by constitutionalising the Schmittian State of Exception through the Maslahat doctrine, collapsing the Rule of Law into sovereign whim. Third, by constructing a theology of enforced ignorance in which the suspension of critical reason is sacred. Fourth, by weaponising juridical language to dissolve the boundary between political dissent and cosmic sacrilege, sustaining servitude through cascading tiers of incentivised betrayal.

1.1 The Juridical Abolition of the Self

The foundational axiom of libertarian philosophy—Self-Ownership, the absolute sovereignty of the individual over body, mind, and legitimately acquired property—undergoes systematic and deliberate constitutional negation within the Islamic Republic.[1] This negation extends beyond the suppression of enumerated civil liberties—free expression, assembly, due process—recognisable as ordinary authoritarianism. What distinguishes the Islamic Republic is the *depth* of its assault: it constitutes a wholesale metaphysical reclassification of the human being, declaring the citizen juridically incompetent and dissolving the remnants of personhood into the abstraction of the *Ummah*, thereby stripping the subject of the conceptual vocabulary required to articulate precisely what has been taken.[2]

The doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) operates as the most ambitious and sweeping property claim over persons in modern constitutional history. Classical Shi'i jurisprudence employed *Wilaya* (guardianship) as a severely circumscribed fiduciary mechanism—a limited power of attorney over specific categories of the legally incompetent: orphans without guardians, the severely mentally disabled.[3] By elevating the *Vali-e Faqih* from caretaker of a narrowly defined class to absolute sovereign over surgeons, entrepreneurs, philosophers, and labourers alike, the doctrine reclassifies the entire Iranian nation as wards of

a celestial court whose administrator is simultaneously judge, beneficiary, and sole interpreter of the terms of guardianship. The citizen is not a principal in the constitutional order but a ward whose rights exist only to the degree that the guardian finds their exercise convenient.[4]

The 1979 Constitution does not violate rights; it constitutionally abolishes them at the apex. The "Islamic qualification" appended to every enumerated right—freedom of the press "except when detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam," freedom of assembly "provided they do not violate the principles of Islam"—renders all positive rights juridically vacuous by subjecting their scope to the monopoly interpretation of the ruling caste.[5]

1.1.1 The Schmittian State of Exception: Constitutionalising Unbounded Discretion

The philosophical architecture of this predatory arrangement reaches its fullest expression through the category Carl Schmitt elaborated in his 1922 *Political Theology*. Schmitt's proposition—"Sovereign is he who decides on the exception"—was not an endorsement of arbitrary power but a structural observation about the logical relationship between law and the extra-legal moment of emergency that every legal order must ultimately confront without legal guidance.[6] What is structurally catastrophic about the Islamic Republic is that it has *pre-emptively constitutionalised* the State of Exception, inscribing permanent extra-legal sovereign discretion into the genetic code of the state through a specific and dateable legal mutation.

The *Maslahat* (Expediency) doctrine was radically transformed by Khomeini in a January 1988 fatwa—delivered at a moment of acute institutional crisis—into an instrument of absolute sovereign discretion. Khomeini declared that the State's primary ordinances take precedence over "all subsidiary precepts, even prayers, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca."[7] This fatwa, hardened into constitutional architecture through the 1989 amendments creating the Expediency Discernment Council, accomplished something structurally unprecedented: it empowered the Supreme Leader to suspend not merely the Iranian Constitution but the primary sources of Islamic law itself—the Quran and authenticated *Hadith*. The Exception was elevated above the Rule in a move whose philosophical brutality has no parallel in modern constitutional history. [8]

The citizen who seeks refuge in the Constitution's text seeks shelter in a document whose every guarantee is conditional on the continued approval of the very power the document ostensibly constrains. The paradox is precisely what Giorgio Agamben identifies: the juridical order suspended in the name of its own preservation, the protection of law invoked to justify the law's abolition.[9]

1.1.2 Bare Life: The Iranian Citizen as Homo Sacer

The Iranian citizen under this constitutional architecture is reduced to what Giorgio Agamben, drawing on archaic Roman law, termed *Homo Sacer*—a person excluded from the community of rights who may be killed by the sovereign without legal consequence but who may not be

sacrificed in any ritual sense that would restore dignity to the death.[10] This figure exists inside the legal order as the permanent object of sovereign discretion. When the Islamic Republic executes a political prisoner under the charge of *Moharebeh*—"waging war against God"—the accused is not denied procedural guarantees. They are stripped of all juridical status as a subject of law, reclassified as a cosmic enemy whose elimination falls beyond any positive-law framework. The theological framing places state violence outside the reach of domestic or international legal accountability.[11]

The mass executions of political prisoners in the summer of 1988—in which Amnesty International documented between 4,482 and 5,000 prisoners killed across multiple facilities in approximately three months, on the basis of a secret fatwa—represents the most complete historical antecedent of the *Homo Sacer* logic in the regime's institutional practice.[12] The prisoners were killed not for crimes currently being committed but because a sovereign calculation determined that their continued biological existence was incompatible with regime stability. Their families were deceived about circumstances and burial locations. The *Homo Sacer* condition is instantiated with clinical precision: the power to kill without legal accountability, exercised at mass scale, on the basis of pure sovereign will.

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1.2 The Theology of Enslavement: Engineering Incompetence as State Policy

For the Guardian to be constitutionally absolute, the subject must be juridically null. A literate, economically independent, critical citizenry is not the Islamic Republic's failure mode; it is its existential enemy. The educational, informational, and cultural apparatus of the state is therefore not oriented toward the formation of capable citizens but toward the systematic production of dependent subjects whose incompetence justifies and perpetuates the guardianship that generates it.[13]

The 1980–1983 Cultural Revolution—overseen by the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council established by Khomeini's direct decree—expelled approximately 25,000 faculty members and students on political and religious grounds, restructured curricula to align with regime ideology, and established the institutional template for ongoing periodic purges.[14]

1.2.1 Censorship as Productive Technology

The Islamic Republic's censorship apparatus is not merely prohibitive but generative: it does not simply block the reception of prohibited information but actively produces a substitute informational environment designed to sustain the cognitive conditions necessary for the reproduction of authority. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance maintains a pre-publication censorship system whose practical effect is not the banned-book list but the far

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more extensive "silent list"—the universe of ideas that publishers self-censor before submission, because the alternative is not rejection but investigation.[15]

The internet filtering architecture, developed systematically following the 2009 Green Movement and continuously refined, constitutes one of the world's most sophisticated deep-packet inspection systems—eliminating access to the global information environment except through circumvention tools that themselves constitute criminal offences under the Computer Crimes Act.[16] The strategic logic of this digital fortress is the management of the *epistemological baseline* of the entire population: the systematic maintenance of an information environment in which comparison between the Islamic Republic's performance and any credible alternative is structurally difficult. A population that cannot access international measures of governance quality, cannot read independent analyses of its own economic deterioration, and cannot communicate outside official channels without criminal risk is a population whose political agency is not merely constrained but cognitively undermined at the root.

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1.3 The Gnostic Architecture: Salvation Through Enforced Ignorance

The Islamic Republic presents itself as a divine intermediary between the earthly community of believers and their paradisiacal destiny, claiming exclusive institutional knowledge of the authentic path to salvation. This structure bears striking structural resemblance to ancient Gnostic cosmological systems—with the revealing difference that where classical Gnosticism offered liberation through the acquisition of secret knowledge (*gnosis*), the Islamic Republic inverts this relationship with deliberate perversity: the suspension of independent inquiry is sacred here, and the exercise of critical reason constitutes the primary heresy.[17]

The regime promises spiritual advancement not to those who seek deeper understanding—the pursuit that animated a millennium of Persian philosophical tradition from Ibn Sina through Mulla Sadra—but to those who cease seeking altogether in all matters touching on governance, political evaluation, and the authority of the ruling jurist. This is the institutionalisation of what Kant identified as the precise antithesis of Enlightenment: the refusal to employ one's own understanding without the guidance of another—*sapere aude* denied not by individual laziness but by state compulsion backed by criminal penalty.[18]

In the cosmological metaphor appropriate to its structure, the Islamic Republic functions as the **Demiurge** of Gnostic mythology—the false creator god who fashioned a deficient material world while appropriating the authority of the transcendent Absolute. The Revolutionary Guards, the *Basij*, and the morality police serve as its **Archons**—the intermediate powers enforcing confinement within the prison of manufactured scarcity and ideological bondage while persuading their captives that the confinement constitutes spiritual ascent.[19]

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The regime's theology of martyrdom—the offer of celestial rewards to young men from economically disenfranchised communities who die in its service—represents the most extreme application of what Mises identified as the problem of time preference. A system that assigns maximal value to a future accessible only through present death, and zero value to any earthly future, has solved the problem of extracting maximum violent effort from the cheapest possible human material: it has simply destroyed the rational subject's capacity to calculate present sacrifice against future benefit by making the future *post-mortem* and therefore immune to any competing earthly offer.[20]

1.4 The Weaponisation of Meaning: Linguistic Totalitarianism

Complementing juridical infantilism and epistemological closure is the regime's systematic destabilisation of language itself as a reliable medium for communicating political reality. Hannah Arendt identified the destruction of language's capacity to refer accurately to reality as the central technical achievement of totalitarian systems: accurate communication is the precondition for collective political action, which means that accurate communication is the primary threat to systems whose survival depends on the impossibility of collective political action.[21]

Classical Islamic jurisprudence restricted terms like *Efsad-fil-Arz* ("Corruption on Earth")—Quranic reference to physical violence against persons and property—to specific, objectively defined acts of armed destruction. The regime has decoupled these terms from their jurisprudential referents and transformed them into what W. B. Gallie called "essentially contested concepts," save that the contesting party is a single authority with a material interest in the most expansive possible application.[22] A labour strike, a journalistic critique, a woman removing a headscarf, a Telegram channel documenting official corruption—each has been, and in January 2026 systematically was, reclassified as either *Efsad-fil-Arz* or *Moharebeh*, depending on what sentence the relevant Revolutionary Court judge—appointed through a chain of loyalty traceable directly to the Supreme Leader—wished to impose.

This destruction of linguistic boundaries serves a deeper ontological purpose: the erasure of the individual ego as the locus of political agency in favour of the collective abstraction of the *Ummah*, defined exclusively by the regime that claims to lead it. The Austrian insight of Methodological Individualism—that only individuals think, value, choose, and act; that collectives have no will, no preferences, and no interests except as fictions derived from aggregated individual wills—is the existential theoretical enemy of every collectivist system, of which the Islamic Republic is merely the most theologically ambitious variant.[23]

1.4.1 The Chain of Voluntary Servitude: La Boétie in Tehran

The durability of this tyranny—maintained not merely by force but by the cooperative participation of millions of ostensibly unwilling subjects—rests on a psychological foundation

identified with extraordinary precision nearly five centuries ago by Étienne de La Boétie in his *Discours de la Servitude Volontaire* (c. 1553).[24] La Boétie's insight was not why the few oppress the many—explicable by the logic of concentrated benefits and dispersed costs—but why the many cooperate in their own subjection. His answer: the tyrant's actual power derives from a hierarchy of subordinates, each of whom receives a marginal increment of privilege in exchange for enforcing the system against those below—a cascade of petty tyrannies sustained not by fear of the sovereign but by the active self-interest of every tier in the chain.[25]

The Islamic Republic has perfected this architecture with a technical sophistication La Boétie could not have anticipated. The *Basij* militiaman receives university admission quotas, civil service hiring preferences, legal immunity for acts of violence against civilians, and access to the regime's subsidised consumer economy. The middle-level bureaucrat enforces ideological conformity in hiring to protect his pension. The state television journalist suppresses accurate reporting to maintain his licence. Each transaction is individually rational; collectively, each transaction sustains an apparatus that immiserates every participant below the apex of the pyramid. The genius of the arrangement—and its most corrosive social consequence—is that it transforms horizontal solidarities of class and neighbourhood into vertical dependencies on the state, eliminating the social basis for collective resistance at precisely the social layer that would otherwise constitute its mass base.[26]

The *Basij*'s complicity is purchased at deliberately calibrated, desperately low prices because the regime has engineered a condition in which even tiny increments of privilege—a *Basij*-card shortcut through a bureaucratic queue, a monthly stipend, a verbal pass at a checkpoint—constitute genuinely significant relative advantages in a general economy of manufactured scarcity. It is not the content of the bribe but its relative magnitude in a systematically impoverished population that makes the architecture work. The revolution against such a system requires not merely correct information but the simultaneous cascade of defecting compliance—which is precisely why the regime's investments in surveillance, communication control, and preemptive detention are not wasteful security expenditures but the rational core of its survival strategy.[27]

CHAPTER 2

The Chimera State: A Taxonomy of Hybrid Tyranny

This chapter classifies the Islamic Republic as a postmodern Institutional Chimera synthesising Leninist, Fascist, and mercantilist-colonial technologies of domination into a single organism of considerable functional coherence. It examines the constitutional mutation effected by Velayat-e Motlaqeh as a legal abolition of private property, the industrialisation of religious legitimacy through the nationalisation of the seminary system, and the falsified electoral dialectic as a macro-scale legitimation laundry designed to insulate actual power from democratic accountability.

To classify the Islamic Republic simply as a theocracy is a reductionist error of significant analytical consequence. The *theocracy* label implies a primary concern with theological correctness—conformity to sacred text—that the regime's behaviour systematically contradicts. A genuine theocracy does not suspend the primary ordinances of Islam by executive fatwa when they inconvenience the state, operate one of the world's largest criminal smuggling enterprises, or maintain a *bonyad* system functioning as an offshore wealth-management vehicle for the ruling clergy.[28] The Islamic Republic is better understood as a postmodern **Institutional Chimera**—an organism assembled from the most operationally efficient predatory technologies of the twentieth century's most successful authoritarian experiments, unified by the solvent of Shi'i theology into a single system of remarkable functional coherence.

It synthesises three distinct and historically tested technologies of political domination. First, the Leninist *nomenklatura* dynamic: all positions of economic and political significance mediated exclusively through demonstrated loyalty to the party-state, enforced through a hierarchy of vetting organisations functioning as loyalty-certification bureaucracies.[29] The Islamic Republic enforces a sociological binary of the Insider (*Khodi*) versus the Outsider (*Gheyr-e-Khodi*): the insider has demonstrably served the revolution, performs visible religious conformity, and does not criticise the system; the outsider is excluded from premium segments of the formal economy, from professional advancement, from political candidacy, and—critically—from legal protection when interests conflict with insider claims.

Second, the Fascist conception of the Organic State: the nation conceived not as an association of rights-bearing individuals but as a macro-biological entity in which the individual is a cellular component fully subordinated to the health of the organic whole.[30] Third, and analytically most potent, the logic of the mercantilist colonial corporation—the East India Company, the VOC—which administered territorial populations as resource-extraction operations rather than as communities with legitimate interests deserving protection.[31]

2.1 The Constitutionalisation of Expropriation: *Velayat-e Motlaqeh* as Property Regime

The insertion of the word "Absolute" into the Guardian's authority through the 1989 constitutional revision was a legal coup d'état of the first order. It abolished private property as a juridically meaningful concept—not through the Marxist mechanism of nationalisation, which at least maintains formal collective title, but through the logical implication of absolutism: if the Jurist possesses divine authority to suspend the primary ordinances of God, he possesses by implication the authority to suspend any citizen's title deed, business licence, bank account, or professional credential at his discretion.[32]

"Private property" in the Islamic Republic is a legal fiction sustained at the regime's discretion. The citizen is a tenant-at-will in their own home, a leaseholder in their own business, a custodian of bank balances the state can confiscate through Revolutionary Court asset seizures. The Revolutionary Courts—operating outside the ordinary judicial system, without public trials, without the right to defence counsel of the defendant's choosing, with confessions extracted under prolonged solitary confinement treated as admissible primary evidence, and with a conviction rate exceeding 99% in political cases—serve as the primary instrument for the conversion of private wealth into regime assets.[33]

The Constitutional Geometry of Absolute Property: Article 57 of the amended Constitution provides that all three branches "exercise their powers under the supervision of the *Vali-e Faqih* with absolute authority." Article 110 grants him the power to "determine the overall policies of the Islamic Republic" and to "supervise the proper execution of the general policies of the system." Read with the Expediency Council's authority to override parliamentary legislation "in the interest of the system," the architecture is complete: no legislative protection of private property can survive the Supreme Leader's determination that regime interest requires otherwise. The Constitution does not violate property rights; it abolishes them at the apex, leaving all subordinate provisions as revocable courtesies.

2.1.1 Setad: The Supreme Leader's Shadow Economy Made Flesh

The most revealing single illustration of how *Velayat-e Motlaqeh* functions as a property regime in practice is the *Setad Ejraiye Farmane Hazrat Emam*—the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam—a vast conglomerate controlled directly by and responsible exclusively to the Office of the Supreme Leader.[34] Founded in 1989 to administer properties of those who had fled or whose assets had been confiscated, *Setad* has evolved into one of the largest economic entities in Iran, with holdings spanning real estate, telecoms, pharmaceuticals, financial services, and energy. None of its assets were acquired through market competition; all were obtained through confiscation orders from Revolutionary Courts or administrative decrees from entities that report to the Supreme Leader. The abstract constitutional claim to absolute property has been implemented here as a concrete, measurable, and documented system for the conversion of private wealth into sovereign capital—the *Velayat-e Motlaqeh* made flesh in balance sheet form.[35]

2.2 The Nationalised Clergy: Manufacturing Legitimacy as an Industrial Process

No predatory state survives solely through the naked exercise of physical force; the energy cost of continuous coercion without the lubricant of legitimacy is prohibitive even for well-resourced authoritarian systems.[36] The Islamic Republic requires a caste of specialists to weave a Myth of Legitimacy cloaking systemic plunder in the guise of piety—a function the nationalised Seminaries (*Howzeh-haye Elmiyeh*) have been systematically repurposed to perform.

The decisive structural transformation was in clerical financing. In the pre-revolutionary period, the Shi'i clerical establishment was financially independent of the state through voluntary tithes—*khums* and *zakat* paid by the faithful to their chosen *marja'*, creating a financial relationship grounding clerical authority in popular legitimacy rather than state appointment.[37] Following the revolution, state budgetary allocations to the *Howzeh* fund a clerical cadre whose curriculum is overseen by state-appointed administrators and whose professional advancement depends on demonstrated loyalty to the *velayat*. The consequence is the total conversion of clerical moral authority into a legitimation service: state-salaried clerics produce the *fiqh* necessary to justify modern banking fraud as Islamic finance, the suppression of civil liberties as divine social regulation, the violent crushing of peaceful dissent as discretionary punishment, and the regime's foreign military adventurism as resistance to global arrogance.[38]

By monopolising the institutional infrastructure of jurisprudential interpretation and controlling the career trajectories of the scholars who man it, the regime has created a closed hermeneutic loop: the victim is religiously obligated, under the *Velayat-e Faqih* constitutional framework, to financially support through taxation and *khums* the very scholarly apparatus that produces the theological justifications for its own victimisation. This is institutional genius of a genuinely perverse order.

2.3 The Dialectical Trap: Institutionalised Schizophrenia and the Electoral Laundromat

The Islamic Republic's dual power structure—a nominally "Republican" layer with elected president and parliament, and an absolute "Revolutionary" layer with non-elected Supreme Leader, IRGC, and judiciary—has been consistently misread by Western analysts as evidence of genuine political pluralism. This misreading mistakes the *function* of the dual structure for its appearance. The elected government does not share power with the non-elected deep state; it serves the deep state as a buffer, accountability sink, and international legitimation instrument.[39]

The elected president, Majlis, and municipal councils function as human shields: purposefully designed to absorb the kinetic energy of economic failure, hyperinflation, unemployment, and public rage. The constitutional architecture ensures that credit and wealth flow continuously to the praetorian class while blame and accountability flow to elected bureaucracy. When the rial collapses, Iranians blame the President. When the banking system fails, Iranians blame the Central Bank governor—appointed by the president but operating within a monetary framework determined by the Supreme Leader's economic priorities. The actual architects of the policies responsible for each disaster are insulated from accountability by the formal attribution of economic management to elected institutions that possess neither the constitutional authority to alter fundamental parameters nor the political independence to resist the resource extraction driving macroeconomic deterioration.[40]

The Guardian Council's pre-election vetting ensures that whoever wins the election has already been certified as safe for the non-elected power structure. By the 2024 elections, only six presidential candidates were permitted to stand from a field of approximately eighty; turnout reached a historically low 40%. The Supreme Leader has openly characterised high electoral turnout as a strategic asset demonstrating the system's "legitimacy" in the face of external pressure, revealing the instrumental relationship: elections are valued not as mechanisms for preference aggregation but as legitimacy-production events whose output is the appearance of consent rather than its substance.[41]

The Iranian population has been trapped in what B. F. Skinner would recognise as a political Skinner Box: induced to vote for "Reformist" candidates in bids to minimise pain—in 1997, 2001, 2009, 2013, 2017—they inadvertently lend democratic legitimacy to the system that holds the whip. Every election participated in under the Guardian Council's pre-filtered candidate pool is a fresh, internationally witnessed endorsement of the architecture of predation. The actual distribution of hard power has never been affected by any electoral outcome in the Islamic Republic's history.

> *The Islamic Republic is not a state that happens to behave badly. It is a system whose architecture is designed for predation, whose legitimising ideology is the theological rationalisation of that predation, and whose reform is therefore not merely unlikely but structurally precluded by the conditions of its own existence. To expect it to reform is to expect a chimera to evolve into one of its component species—which is not evolution but dissolution.*

Notes

[1]Self-ownership as the foundation of all rights is most rigorously defended in Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty*, pp. 28–35. The philosophical genealogy running from Locke through Herbert Spencer to Rothbard is traced in Jan Narveson, *The Libertarian Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), chs. 4–5.

[2]The mechanism by which totalitarian systems deprive subjects of the linguistic resources for political self-articulation is identified in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), pp. 438–459. In the Iranian context, the systematic instrumentalisation of Shi'i jurisprudential vocabulary to pre-empt secular rights discourse is documented in Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, trans. John O'Kane (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 85–115.

[3]For the classical jurisprudential limits of *Wilaya* in Shi'i *fiqh*, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 178–182. The extension of guardianship from specific incapacitated individuals to the entirety of the political community had no accepted precedent in mainstream Shi'i jurisprudence prior to Khomeini's radical rearticulation, which Sachedina characterises as a doctrinal rupture masquerading as recovery. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*, pp. 220–256.

[4]Khomeini's 1970 lectures make the scope explicit: the supreme jurist possesses "the same authority as the Prophet and the Imams" in all matters of governance. Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, pp. 59–62. The 1979 Constitution, revised definitively in 1989, enshrines this authority in Articles 5, 57, and 110, the last of which grants the Supreme Leader command of all armed forces, appointment of the judiciary's head, and the power to determine "the overall policies of the Islamic Republic." Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, pp. 20–65.

[5]Schirazi's meticulous analysis demonstrates that the Guardian Council's exclusive monopoly over the interpretation of "Islamic principles"—exercised through its veto over legislation and its disqualification of electoral candidates—renders every enumerated right an unenforceable courtesy. Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, pp. 85–104. The Guardian Council (*Shura-ye Negahban*) consists entirely of individuals appointed, directly or indirectly, by the Supreme Leader, ensuring that the interpretive monopoly is structurally incapable of constraining the apex authority it ostensibly serves.

[6]Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 5. For the canonical secondary treatment, see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 1–31.

[7]Khomeini's fatwa of January 1988, addressed to then-president Ali Khamenei, is reproduced and analysed in Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), pp. 23–29. The constitutional formalisation in the Expediency Council (*Majma'-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam*), established by the 1989 constitutional revision, is documented in Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, pp. 225–250.

[8]Schirazi's assessment is precise: "Khomeini's ruling transformed the Islamic state from a state limited by Islamic law into an Islamic state with unlimited powers." Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, p. 197. Montazeri's

letter of March 1989 warning that *Velayat-e Motlaqeh* was incompatible with Shi'i jurisprudence and would produce the "Sultanification" of religious leadership is reproduced in Hossein Ali Montazeri, *Khaterat* [Memoirs] (Los Angeles: Ketab Corp, 2001), vol. 2, pp. 428–446.

[9] Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 23. For empirical documentation of how this operates in Iranian judicial practice—Revolutionary Courts functioning without procedural requirements, without right to counsel, with confessions extracted under isolation treated as primary evidence—see Human Rights Watch, *"No Room for Defense": Iran's Exclusion of Lawyers from Political Cases* (New York: HRW, 2020), pp. 10–25; and Amnesty International, *Iran: The Last Line of Defence* (London: Amnesty International, 2018).

[10] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 71–86. The *Homo Sacer* figure exists inside the legal order exclusively as the permanent object of sovereign discretion: life preserved or extinguished not according to established rules but according to the sovereign's momentary calculation of interest.

[11] The charge of *Moharebeh* (Quranic reference: 5:33) carries mandatory death under the Iranian Penal Code (Article 279, amended 2013). Its application has been systematically expanded from classical jurisprudential scope—armed highway robbery—to encompass peaceful protest, online activism, and opposition affiliation. The January 2026 post-uprising executions accelerated this expansion dramatically, with courts processing *Moharebeh* convictions at unprecedented speed under the communications blackout. See Amnesty International, *Condemned for Protest: Iran's Use of the Death Penalty Against Demonstrators* (New York: HRW, 2023); and Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, *Omid Memorial Database* (accessed 2026), https://www.iranrights.org/memorial.

[12] The 1988 prison massacres are documented in Geoffrey Robertson QC, *The Massacre of Political Prisoners in Iran, 1988* (Washington, DC: Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, 2010), which provides the most systematic legal reconstruction. A tape-recorded confrontation in which Ayatollah Montazeri challenged the three-man death commission responsible for Tehran's prisons was released posthumously in 2016 and provides direct testimony from perpetrators. Amnesty International, *Iran: Blood-Soaked Secrets* (London: Amnesty International, 2018), documents the regime's subsequent concealment. The logic of the 1988 massacres—killing not for present crimes but for sovereign determination that continued biological existence is incompatible with state interest—is replicated, with technological updating, in the January 2026 operations.

[13] The systematic use of educational institutions as instruments of political formation rather than cognitive development is documented in Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), pp. 85–127. Harris analyses the post-revolutionary expansion of the state-controlled university system as an instrument of incorporation and surveillance rather than genuine human capital formation. The university entrance system (*Konkur*) formally meritocratic but operationally filtered through an "Islamic knowledge and culture" examination—whose passing requires demonstrated ideological conformity—functions as a pre-entry political vetting mechanism.

[14] The Cultural Revolution of 1980–1983 is estimated to have expelled approximately 25,000 students and faculty. See Mohsen Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 229. Lecturers whose teaching produces critical rather than conformist graduates face professional and personal consequences constituting a permanent chilling force on the entire educational ecosystem: the *Guzinesh* (selection) vetting system, applied to civil service and university appointments, requires demonstrated "belief in Islam and the Islamic Republic" and "practical commitment to Islamic precepts." For systematic application against minorities and political opponents, see Human Rights Watch, *Iran: Freedom of Expression in the Kurdish Regions* (New York: HRW, 2009).

[15] The pre-publication censorship system requires all books to obtain permits from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Publishers routinely self-censor far beyond formal requirements to avoid the consequences of rejection. The International Publishers Association, *Iran Report on Freedom of Expression and the Book Trade*

(Geneva: IPA, 2010), documents the system's scope, noting that the silent list is substantially more extensive than the formal prohibited list.

[16] Iran's internet filtering employs deep-packet inspection (DPI) technology capable of identifying and blocking not only URLs but encrypted protocol signatures. As of 2024, an estimated 70–80% of domestic internet traffic passed through circumvention tools, formally illegal but selectively prosecuted. During crisis periods—most dramatically the November 2019 blackout and the January 2026 total shutdown—even VPN infrastructure was disrupted through L7-level protocol blocking and BGP withdrawal at the Telecommunications Infrastructure Company's National Information Network gateway. See Collin Anderson and Karim Sadjadpour, *Iran's Cyber Threat* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018); Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net: Iran* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2024).

[17] The classical Gnostic systems shared the premise that liberation from a corrupt material world is achieved through esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*). See Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983). Henry Corbin's study of Iranian Shi'i mysticism, *En Islam iranien*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971–72), documents the authentic Shi'i intellectual tradition of philosophical and mystical inquiry (*irfan*) that the Islamic Republic systematically suppressed in favour of its own inverted epistemology.

[18] Kant's definition: "Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority" and the courage to "dare to know." Immanuel Kant, "Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784). The *Velayat-e Faqih* framework converts the classical bounded institution of *Taqlid*—religious imitation in matters of ritual law, where genuine technical expertise is required—into an instrument of total political obedience across all domains of civic and intellectual life, a transformation explicitly rejected by several of the most senior *maraje'* of the twentieth century, including Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei and Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*, pp. 243–256.

[19] The morality police (*Gasht-e Ershad*), formally constituted under the Law on Observation of Public Chastity (2005), became the proximate trigger for the 2022 uprising following the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, on 16 September 2022. The *Gasht-e Ershad* was formally "suspended" in late 2022 under political pressure, then operationally reconstituted in modified form by 2024, its functions partially redistributed to IRGC plainclothes units. By January 2026, enforcement of dress codes and public comportment had been transferred to a more mobile, less formally uniformed apparatus whose operational invisibility made accountability still more elusive.

[20] The Austrian theory of time preference—the universal tendency to prefer present goods to future goods of equivalent quality—is foundational in Mises, *Human Action*, pp. 480–497, and in Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, *Capital and Interest*, trans. George Huncke and Hans Sennholz, 3 vols. (South Holland, IL: Libertarian Press, 1959). The theological manipulation of time preference by promising infinite future rewards (paradise) for finite present sacrifice (death in the regime's service) is analysed as an economic phenomenon in Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 1–49. Saeid Golkar's sociological study of *Basij* recruitment demonstrates that material benefits—not ideological conviction—drive active service, with the martyrdom theology functioning as a supplementary legitimating narrative rather than the primary motivational mechanism. Saeid Golkar, *Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Iran* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2015), pp. 45–112.

[21] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 462–474. Orwell's analysis—"Politics and the English Language" (1946) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)—remains the most accessible treatment of how political language is systematically corrupted to prevent accurate description of political reality.

[22] W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1956): 167–198. In the Iranian legal context, a concept whose application is determined by a single authority with a vested interest in expansive interpretation is not essentially contested but essentially weaponised. The Abdorrahman Boroumand

Center's *Omid* database records over 23,000 documented executions since 1979, a significant proportion under charges whose classical jurisprudential scope bears no relationship to the acts for which individuals were convicted.

[23] Mises: "The collective has no existence and reality but in the actions of individuals." Mises, *Human Action*, p. 42. For the implications for the critique of collectivist political arrangements, see F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), pp. 53–106; and Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty*, pp. 26–28.

[24] Étienne de La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, trans. Harry Kurz (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012). Murray Rothbard identified it as one of the foundational texts of libertarian political thought. Murray N. Rothbard, introduction to Étienne de La Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975), p. 10.

[25] La Boétie, *Discourse*, pp. 52–55: "He who abuses you so has only two eyes, only two hands, one body… The only advantage he has over you is the advantage you give him to destroy you." The sociological mechanism of tiered servitude—distributing privilege downward through a hierarchy of enforcers—is La Boétie's central analytical contribution, anticipating by four centuries what game theory would formalise as the sub-game perfect enforcement equilibrium.

[26] Golkar, *Captive Society*, pp. 113–185, documents the specific material benefits of *Basij* membership through interviews with current and former members, finding that material benefit rather than ideological conviction is the primary driver of active service. The game-theoretic structure in which individual defection from the oppressive system is irrational even for those who would collectively benefit from its dissolution is a variant of the prisoner's dilemma sustained by selective, exemplary violence against visible defectors. For the political science of preference falsification in authoritarian contexts, see Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 1–32.

[27] Kuran's analysis of revolutionary cascades—in which preference falsification (the public concealment of private opposition) makes authoritarian collapse appear sudden and unexpected—is essential for understanding the dynamics of Iranian uprisings. Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies*, pp. 247–276. The January 2026 uprising represented precisely such a cascade: the simultaneous, cross-provincial character of the protests indicated a preference-falsification equilibrium collapsing faster than any single security apparatus could manage, which is the analytical explanation for why the regime responded with eliminationist rather than selective violence—selective punishment becomes logistically impossible when defection exceeds a critical threshold.

[28] The constitutionalisation of authority to suspend Islamic law through the *Maslahat* doctrine—examined in Chapter 1—establishes definitively that the Islamic Republic is not constrained by theological considerations when these conflict with state interest. Khomeini made this explicit in the 1988 fatwa: "The government… is one of the primary rules of Islam and has priority over all subsidiary precepts, even prayers, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca." Cited in Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, p. 24. For the *bonyad* system as a vehicle for ruling-class wealth accumulation, see Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Transforming Iran from Theocracy into Military Dictatorship* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2013), pp. 83–142.

[29] The Soviet *nomenklatura* system is documented definitively in Michael Voslensky, *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 55–100. The Islamic Republic's equivalent is the *Guzinesh* system, operated through the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and Ministry of Intelligence, vetting candidates for civil service, university admission, and professional licences. As of the 2024 parliamentary elections, approximately 40% of registered candidates were disqualified by the Guardian Council, operationalising the *Khodi/Gheyr-e-Khodi* distinction at the electoral level. Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, pp. 30–46.

[30] Roger Griffin's definition of fascism as a "palingenetic ultranationalist" ideology is from Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 26–55. In the Islamic Republic's formulation, the dissident

is not merely a political opponent but a pathological cell—a cancer threatening the body politic—requiring violent surgical excision. Supreme Leader Khamenei has repeatedly deployed this biological metaphor in official discourse, characterising the opposition as *nabkar* (cancerous) and *najes* (ritually impure). The metaphorical structure is analysed in Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 22–45.

[31] The East India Company's governance of Bengal following the 1765 grant of *diwani* (revenue collection rights) is the paradigmatic case: a territorial population of tens of millions administered exclusively through the logic of revenue extraction, with governance provisions offered only to the minimum extent necessary to maintain the taxable value of the productive population. Nick Robins, *The Corporation That Changed the World* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), pp. 81–130. The Islamic Republic functions less as a Westphalian sovereign state—whose theoretical characteristic is the representation of a population's interests—than as an occupying corporate force viewing the Iranian population not as a homeland to develop but as a hostile resource-extraction zone to maximise and secure.

[32] The 1989 constitutional revision removed the requirement that the Supreme Leader be the most senior *marja'* in Shi'i jurisprudence (enabling Khamenei's appointment despite his jurisprudential junior status), inserted "Absolute" into the *Vali-e Faqih*'s authority, and elevated the Expediency Council to resolve conflicts between parliament and the Guardian Council with a presumption in favour of state interest over doctrinal restraint. The revised Article 57 states explicitly that the three branches of government exercise their powers "under the supervision of the absolute *Vali-e Faqih*." Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, pp. 202–230. Montazeri's warning that the "Sultanification" of religious leadership would result is in Montazeri, *Khaterat*, vol. 2, pp. 428–446.

[33] The Revolutionary Courts' formal subordination to the Supreme Leader through the judiciary's head (a Supreme Leader appointee) ensures that they cannot function as checks on executive power. Their near-perfect conviction rate in political cases is consistent with their function as instruments of property transfer and political elimination rather than fact-finding. Human Rights Watch, *"No Room for Defense"* (2020); Amnesty International, *Flawed Reforms: Iran's New Code of Criminal Procedure* (London: Amnesty International, 2016).

[34] A Reuters investigative series (November 2013) documented *Setad*'s structure through analysis of Iranian corporate registries, real estate records, and court documents, finding assets estimated at approximately $95 billion (2013 valuations), derived substantially from properties expropriated from Iranians who had fled the country, religious minorities (Baha'is, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians), and political opponents through Revolutionary Court proceedings. Steve Stecklow, Babak Dehghanpisheh, and Yeganeh Torbati, "Assets of the Ayatollah," Reuters, 11 November 2013. Unlike the *bonyads*, which maintain at least the formal appearance of charitable purpose, *Setad* reports to no external authority whatsoever—not parliament, not the judiciary, not any regulatory body—only to the Supreme Leader's office.

[35] The targeting of Baha'i properties by *Setad* is particularly systematically documented. The Baha'i International Community has compiled records of over 600 cases of business closures, property confiscations, and licence revocations targeting Baha'i-owned enterprises, many resulting in asset transfers to *Setad*-affiliated entities. Baha'i International Community, *The Persecution of Baha'is in Iran's Business Sector* (New York: BIC, 2013). The Baha'i community's experience constitutes a controlled experiment in the property regime's operation: a community that is sufficiently marginalised to be targeted without political cost, yet sufficiently economically productive to generate substantial confiscatable wealth.

[36] Max Weber's analysis of the three pure types of legitimate authority—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal—establishes that no system of domination is sustained by force alone; each must generate legitimating beliefs that lead the dominated to accept the validity of the authority over them. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 212–254.

[37] The pre-revolutionary financial independence of the senior Shi'i clergy is documented in Roy Mottahedeh,

The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), pp. 175–200; and Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 15–40. Mottahedeh describes the Shi'i clerical institution as, before the revolution, "the most fully autonomous and self-financing" major religious institution in the world. The post-revolutionary destruction of this financial independence converted the clergy from an independent estate capable of checking arbitrary power into a state appendage producing the theological justifications for that power.

[38] The Islamic Republic's system of "interest-free banking" replaces explicit interest with legally mandated euphemisms (profit-sharing agreements, leasing arrangements) that function identically in economic practice while providing religious cover for a conventional financial system. The reform-minded cleric Mohsen Kadivar's academic work demonstrates that *Velayat-e Faqih* is one among several possible political theologies in the Shi'i tradition, rather than the authoritative one, for which he was imprisoned. Mohsen Kadivar, "An Introduction to the Public and Private Debate in Islam," *Social Research* 70, no. 3 (2003): 659–680.

[39] The most sophisticated pluralist reading is Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), which provides genuine empirical value on intra-elite competition while failing to account for the structural fact that factional competition never extends to the *velayat* itself. For the structural counterargument, see Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–30; and Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, pp. 1–30.

[40] This accountability-insulation mechanism was most clearly demonstrated during the 2018–2020 economic crisis, when reimposed US sanctions combined with structural vulnerabilities produced a currency collapse of approximately 60%. President Rouhani bore the public political cost, despite the nuclear programme triggering the sanctions, the IRGC's economic activities generating dollar demand outside official channels, and the monetary policy of the Central Bank all being determined by institutions beyond his authority. See Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, "Iran's Economy in the Shadow of Sanctions," *Middle East Journal* 75, no. 1 (2021): 11–36.

[41] Khamenei described the June 2013 presidential election as a "political epic" (*hamase-ye siyasi*) demonstrating the Islamic Republic's popular legitimacy. *KHAMENEI.IR*, "The People of Iran Created an Epic," 16 June 2013, https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1896. For the political science of electoral authoritarian regimes and the function of elections in sustaining rather than limiting authoritarian control, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1–52.

PART II

The Economics of Predation

"Inflation is the fiscal complement of statism and arbitrary government.
It is a cog in the complex of policies and institutions which gradually lead
towards totalitarianism."
— Ludwig von Mises, *Planning for Freedom* (1952)

CHAPTER 3

The Architecture of Plunder

This chapter dissects the Islamic Republic's economic machinery through three interlocking mechanisms of wealth destruction. First, the Praetorian Conglomerates—the IRGC's industrial empire and the para-state bonyad network—which function not as market actors but as engines of entropy, metabolising organised productive capital into high-entropy patronage and geopolitical expenditure. Second, the Closed-Access Order converting legal protection itself into a purchased commodity. Third, systematic inflation as a regressive hidden tax whose directional violence—from working poor to connected elite—is not policy error but the Cantillon Effect as deliberate statecraft.

3.1 The Praetorian Conglomerates and the Entropic Economy

If the theology of the Islamic Republic constitutes the mask through which power presents itself to the world, and the juridical architecture examined in Part I constitutes the skeleton through which power reproduces itself, then the economic apparatus constitutes the digestive tract of a Leviathan that feeds not on current production but on the accumulated productive capacity of the past. In a functioning market order, capital accumulation follows from the voluntary deferral of present consumption—the forward-looking decision, grounded in positive time preference, to sacrifice present enjoyment for the amplified returns of future productivity.[1] The Islamic Republic has innovated the systematic negation of this process at civilisational scale through the **Praetorian Conglomerate**: entities possessing all the legal privileges of private firms combined with the coercive immunities of the state apparatus, including exemption from taxation, immunity from independent judicial review, and access to subsidised foreign currency at official rates unavailable to private competitors.[2]

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has evolved over four decades from a revolutionary militia into the most comprehensively integrated military-economic entity in modern history. Khatam al-Anbiya (KAA), the IRGC's primary engineering conglomerate, receives no-bid contracts spanning oil and gas pipeline infrastructure, the Tehran metro system, dam construction, and telecommunications backbone—not through competitive tender but through direct award by executive bodies staffed by IRGC-affiliated officials reviewing bids submitted by IRGC-affiliated contractors.[3]

The economic logic of the Praetorian Conglomerate is fundamentally distinct from that of the profit-seeking private firm. The private entrepreneur, operating in a competitive environment with genuine property rights, has an incentive to deploy resources in their highest-valued use because the resulting profit accrues to him and the resulting loss depletes his own capital. The praetorian manager holds what economists following Armen Alchian call *usufruct* rather than genuine ownership: the right to enjoy the benefits of an asset without bearing the full consequences of its depreciation.[4] The rational behaviour of the usufruct holder under political uncertainty is not investment in long-term productive capacity but strip-mining: rapid conversion of capital assets into liquid claims that can survive a change in the political wind. The result is systematic entropic flow—the transformation of high-value, organised productive capital into the disorder of patronage payments, geopolitical expenditure, and untraceable offshore accounts.

The Thermodynamics of Institutionalised Plunder: The private entrepreneur functions as Maxwell's Demon—sorting molecules from high-entropy disorder into low-entropy organised states, creating value by imposing structure on chaos. The Praetorian Conglomerate inverts this dynamic with thermodynamic precision: it receives already-organised capital (functioning infrastructure, established enterprises, legally registered title) and returns it to the high-entropy state of patronage disbursements and military expenditure. The net effect across four decades is the conversion of Iran's extraordinary natural resource endowment into the chronic impoverishment of a nation whose material inheritance makes its poverty a crime rather than a misfortune.

The *bonyad* system complements the IRGC's direct industrial empire with a network of para-state charitable foundations whose combined economic footprint encompasses a structurally dominant share of Iranian GDP.[5]

The combined effect of the IRGC's direct empire and the *bonyad* system is the effective elimination of genuine market competition in the most lucrative sectors of the Iranian economy. Private entrepreneurs attempting to compete with entities that pay no taxes, receive preferential access to subsidised foreign currency, obtain government contracts through political rather than competitive mechanisms, and can invoke security considerations to escape regulatory oversight face not market competition but state-backed monopoly. The result is what Douglass North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast identify as the defining characteristic of a "natural state": an economy in which "economic activity provides rents that support the political system and the political system limits access to economic activity to create rents."[6]

3.2 The Architecture of Institutionalised Theft: The Closed-Access Order in Practice

The economic operational mode of the Islamic Republic is frequently characterised in Western commentary as "crony capitalism" or "kleptocracy"—terms whose descriptive colour conceals the degree to which they mischaracterise the structural formality of the predation. "Crony capitalism" implies a market system whose rules have been bent by politically connected actors: the deviation from competitive rules is the *exception*, maintained by hidden corruption of a nominally rule-governed system. What operates in Iran is categorically different: a system in which political loyalty is the *constitutive rule* of economic participation, not a deviation from it.[7]

Access to markets, lucrative government contracts, import licences for protected commodities, subsidised foreign currency, and the basic legal protections making long-term commercial investment rational are each exclusively mediated through demonstrated political loyalty. This architecture operates at every level simultaneously, from the macro-economic allocation of oil revenues to the micro-economic distribution of import licences for household appliances. The result is a comprehensive system of institutionalised rent extraction in which the transaction costs of market participation are calibrated to be prohibitively high for the politically unconnected and artificially low for the politically loyal.[8]

The deliberate engineering of scarcity as a mechanism of political discipline represents the system's most insidious micro-economic dimension. Near-total bans on the import of major categories of consumer durables simultaneously accomplish three political-economic objectives: they protect domestic monopolies serving as sinecures for regime loyalists from competitive pressure; they generate immense arbitrage rents for IRGC-affiliated smuggling networks supplying suppressed demand; and they create a perverse psychological mechanism by which individual citizens' momentary economic interests align with the scarcity regime that collectively impoverishes them—the automobile lottery winner having a direct material interest, in that moment, in the continued maintenance of the import ban that makes his lottery ticket valuable.[9]

3.3 The Monetary Weapon: Inflation as the Regressive Hidden Tax

Inflation in the Islamic Republic must be understood, in the tradition of Austrian monetary theory, not as the regrettable consequence of fiscal difficulties but as a deliberate, hostile strategy of wealth transfer and social control whose distributional consequences are both precisely predictable and ruthlessly exploited.[10] The Central Bank of Iran functions as the invisible engine of mass expropriation: a machine that liquidates the accumulated labour of the working population through the systematic destruction of the currency's purchasing power. Annual consumer price inflation has exceeded 20% in every year since 2013, exceeded

40% in 2018 following the reimposition of comprehensive sanctions, and reached 45–50% in 2022–2023 according to IMF data, with the cumulative rial depreciation against the dollar exceeding 98% since 2012.[11]

The specific mechanism through which inflation operates as a wealth transfer was identified with analytical precision by Richard Cantillon in his *Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en Général* (c. 1730): newly created money does not raise all prices simultaneously and uniformly but enters the economy at a specific insertion point, radiating outward with the velocity of price effects diminishing with distance from that point. Those who receive the new money first—before prices have adjusted—enjoy a gain in real purchasing power; those who receive it last suffer a corresponding loss.[12]

In the Islamic Republic, the insertion point of newly created money is precisely identified: it flows first to state-owned banks lending to *bonyad*-affiliated enterprises at subsidised interest rates; to IRGC contractors receiving advance payments on no-bid contracts; to entities that obtain preferential access to official exchange rates, immediately converting to hard assets at the pre-inflation exchange rate. By the time this monetary expansion percolates to the wage earner, the pensioner, and the schoolteacher whose salary adjustment has been pending for months, the price level has already adjusted sharply upward. The brutal regressive tax has been collected silently, without parliamentary authorisation, without public awareness of its mechanism, and without political accountability to the population bearing its cost.[13]

40%+

Annual consumer price inflation, 2018–2026 (IMF data). Cumulative rial depreciation against the US dollar: approximately 99.7% since its pre-revolutionary purchasing power.

The deeper, more structurally consequential effect is the destruction of the society's time preference mechanism—and through it, the social capacity for civilisational reproduction. By destroying the currency as a reliable store of value, the Islamic Republic forces the population into an artificially elevated state of time preference in which saving is economically irrational, deferral is mathematically punished, and the planning horizons of ordinary economic life shrink to the immediate present.[14]

CHAPTER 4

Autophagy: The Self-Consuming System

This chapter analyses the terminal phase of the Islamic Republic's political economy: the autophagic collapse in which the system has begun consuming its own structural preconditions for continued operation. It examines the irreversible civilisational asset destruction in ecological, hydrological, and demographic dimensions, and the pathological codependency between an addicted praetorian elite and a starved general population—the metabolic conditions from which the January 2026 Massacre became not merely possible but structurally inevitable.

4.1 The Metabolic Collapse: Consuming the Seed Corn

Every complex system requires what biologists term metabolic equilibrium: the continuous renewal of what is consumed, the maintenance of the organisational structures enabling future function. A system that consumes its own metabolic inputs—depleting the structures enabling its future function—has entered autophagy: the consumption of the organism's own cellular components when external nutrients are unavailable. Applied to political economy, autophagic collapse describes the condition in which a system survives the present by cannibalising the structural resources—capital, ecological substrate, human expertise, institutional trust—that would be required for any viable future.[15] The Iranian economy has entered this phase with a specificity and measurability exceeding ordinary political metaphor: the damage is geological, hydrological, and demographic—structural and irreversible in ways distinguishing it categorically from ordinary economic recession.

Iran's groundwater crisis represents perhaps the most documented and irreversible dimension of this autophagic process. Three hundred of Iran's 609 groundwater basins are in a state of over-exploitation, with extraction exceeding natural recharge by approximately 5–8 billion cubic metres per year. Land subsidence in Tehran, measured by satellite interferometry, reaches 25–35 centimetres per year in southern districts—a physical marker of irreversible aquifer collapse.[16]

4.2 The Addict and the Starved: A Pathological Codependency

The relationship between the Iranian people and the ruling praetorian class has evolved over four decades from a political relationship into a pathological metabolic codependency. The general public is systematically starved of the basic material inputs for human flourishing: capital, educational opportunity unconstrained by ideological vetting, professional recognition unmediated by political loyalty, and the psychological security of a currency whose value does not dissolve between payday and the market.[17]

Conversely, the praetorian elite—IRGC commanders, senior clerics doubling as business managers, currency arbitrageurs—have been converted through four decades of guaranteed, effort-free rent extraction into what addiction medicine would recognise as a population of severe physical dependents, hopelessly habituated to a drug—unearned income generated by political monopoly—whose withdrawal would be existentially catastrophic. The IRGC commander who has spent thirty years managing contracts awarded without competitive tender, the *bonyad* director whose organisation has never faced the market test of voluntary consumer choice—neither of these individuals possesses, at this stage, any economic competency transferable to a competitive market environment. They have experienced the complete and irreversible atrophy of the productive faculties that markets reward, for the simple reason that those rewards have never been necessary for their material advancement.[18]

This praetorian class defends the regime not from ideological conviction—surveys consistently indicate declining religiosity among younger IRGC cohorts—but from the desperate, violent self-preservation instinct of the addict confronting permanent withdrawal. Economic liberalisation would expose their complete absence of competitive productive capacity. This is the structural logic behind the January 2026 massacre: not ideological fervour but the cornered, terminal violence of entities whose material survival depends on the continued existence of the system being challenged.

Notes

[1]The Austrian theory of capital, developed by Böhm-Bawerk in *Capital and Interest* and systematised in Mises, *Human Action*, pp. 479–534, grounds the structure of production in individuals' time preferences. Capital formation requires that individuals value future goods sufficiently to abstain from consuming the factors that could produce them immediately. The Islamic Republic's systematic destruction of this mechanism—through inflation, confiscation, and the usufruct incentive structure of the praetorian sector—is analysed through this chapter.

[2]The definitive analysis of the IRGC's economic empire is Michael Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), pp. 35–80, estimating the IRGC's combined economic holdings at between 25% and 40% of Iran's GDP. Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, pp. 1–50, traces the evolution from revolutionary militia (1979) through war-economy logistics (1980–1988), postwar reconstruction positioning (1989–2005), to the militarisation of the economy phase (2005–present), during which the Ahmadinejad privatisation programme transferred state-owned enterprises not to private shareholders but to IRGC-affiliated entities.

[3]The US Treasury Department's 2007 designation of Khatam al-Anbiya as a proliferation-supporting entity documented its role as the primary vehicle for IRGC economic operations: "KAA is Iran's largest construction firm and is controlled by the IRGC…involved in numerous large-scale projects including pipelines, tunnels, and dams, and also involved in projects that support Iran's WMD programs." US Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, Designation of Iranian Entities for Proliferation Activities, 25 October 2007. For analysis of the no-bid contracting system, see Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, pp. 83–142.

[4]Armen Alchian and Harold Demsetz, "Production, Information Costs, and Economic Organisation," *American Economic Review* 62, no. 5 (1972): 777–795, established the foundational analysis of how property rights structure economic incentives. The usufruct problem in quasi-state entities—managers capturing gains of good decisions while socialising losses of bad ones—is formalised in Jean Tirole, *The Theory of the Firm* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 15–56. Suzanne Maloney, *Iran's Political Economy since the Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 190–230, applies this framework to Iranian quasi-state entities.

[5]The range of estimates—10% to 40% of GDP—reflects genuine analytic uncertainty produced by the *bonyads*' exemption from parliamentary audit and their use of overlapping holding structures. The Foundation for the Oppressed (*Bonyad-e Mostaz'afin*), managing more than 350 companies across agriculture, construction, tourism, publishing, and manufacturing, pays no taxes, submits no audited accounts to parliament, and reports exclusively to the Supreme Leader. The Imam Reza Endowment (*Astan-e Quds-e Razavi*) manages an estimated 22% of all arable land in Khorasan province and operates a business empire spanning carpet manufacturing to ostrich farming, entirely beyond democratic accountability. Maloney, *Iran's Political Economy*, pp. 85–145; Jahangir Amuzegar, *Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 245–285.

[6]Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 17–20. The authors identify limited access orders—in which the dominant coalition controls economic and political organisations to generate the rents holding the coalition together—as the characteristic governance form of most human societies throughout history. The Islamic Republic represents an extreme case, distinguished by the additional element of theological legitimation converting ordinary rent-seeking into divinely mandated stewardship.

[7]North, Wallis, and Weingast make the precise distinction: in a natural state, "giving economic privileges to powerful organisations is not corruption, it is the normal operating procedure of the system." North et al., *Violence and Social Orders*, p. 20. For the application to the Iranian case, see Maloney, *Iran's Political Economy*, pp. 44–85. The private-sector entrepreneurs who would form the constituency for liberalisation have been systematically displaced by IRGC and *bonyad* conglomerates dominating every economically significant sector.

[8]Douglas North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 27–69. The formal rules in the Islamic Republic are deliberately designed to maximise transaction costs for the politically unconnected while minimising them for the connected, producing an institutional environment whose primary output is rent transfer rather than economic coordination. The Heritage Foundation's *Index of Economic Freedom* (2024) ranks Iran 176th out of 184 economies, citing property rights insecurity, judicial ineffectiveness, and pervasive government interference as primary factors.

[9]Iran's automotive sector is the paradigmatic case. IKCO (Iran Khodro) and SAIPA, effectively controlled by state-linked entities, operate under comprehensive import protection producing vehicles whose quality, safety standards, and fuel efficiency lag decades behind international comparators. The automobile lottery (*peesh-forush*) system distributes the right to purchase domestically produced vehicles at factory price by lottery, converting regime-generated scarcity into micro-economic benefits distributed to individual winners—each of whom becomes a tiny stakeholder in the import ban sustaining the premium. For the Resistance Economy analysis, see Ali Fathollah-Nejad, "Iran's Economy: Twenty Years of Stagnation," *Middle East Journal* 72, no. 1 (2018): 11–35.

[10]Mises established the foundational critique: "Inflation is the true fiscal complement of statism and arbitrary government." Ludwig von Mises, *Planning for Freedom*, 4th ed. (South Holland, IL: Libertarian Press, 1980), p. 79. Hayek elaborated: "inflation is not a catastrophe of the elements or a disease that comes like the plague. Inflation is a policy." Friedrich Hayek, *A Tiger by the Tail*, ed. Sudha Shenoy (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1972), p. 16.

[11]IMF, *Islamic Republic of Iran: Staff Report for the 2023 Article IV Consultation* (Washington, DC: IMF, 2024), Statistical Appendix, Table 3. The structural fiscal deficit—generated by the gap between the regime's commitments to the praetorian class and its revenues from a sanctions-constrained oil sector—is monetised through money creation, making chronic inflation a predictable institutional output rather than a policy accident. The IRGC and *bonyad* sector's exemption from taxation significantly narrows the revenue base, making deficit monetisation structurally unavoidable within the regime's political constraints.

[12]Richard Cantillon, *Essay on the Nature of Commerce in General*, ed. and trans. Henry Higgs (London: Macmillan, 1931), pp. 161–177. Mises formalises the redistributive logic: those whose incomes consist of things whose money prices rise earlier and to a higher degree gain; those whose incomes consist of things whose prices rise later and to a smaller degree lose. Mises, *Human Action*, p. 547. In the Iranian context, the first recipients are state-linked banks lending to *bonyad*-affiliated enterprises at subsidised rates, IRGC contractors receiving advance payments on no-bid contracts, and entities obtaining preferential official exchange rates immediately converted to hard assets. The last recipients are wage earners, pensioners, and holders of rial-denominated savings.

[13]At peak differential (2018–2020), the official dollar rate was approximately 42,000 rials while the open market

rate was approximately 110,000–160,000 rials. An entity allocated $1 million at the official rate and reselling at the open market rate captured a pure arbitrage profit of approximately $1.5–$3 million per transaction with no productive activity involved. The scale of this rent is estimated at $10–20 billion annually. Salehi-Isfahani, "Iran's Economy in the Shadow of Sanctions," p. 23. The regressive incidence falls most heavily on households that lack access to real estate, gold, or foreign currency as inflation hedges—only the top income quintile holds meaningful quantities of these instruments. Lower-income households hold their savings primarily in rial-denominated bank deposits eroding at the rate of inflation less the administratively capped deposit interest rate.

[14] Mises, *Human Action*, pp. 483–497; Böhm-Bawerk, *Capital and Interest*. The behavioural and social consequences of chronically high inflation in Iran include dramatically declining marriage rates (from approximately 10.5 per 1,000 population in 1996 to approximately 6.5 per 1,000 by 2022), rising average age at first marriage by approximately five years for both sexes, and declining family formation rates reflecting the reduced economic security necessary for long-term commitments. Statistics Centre of Iran, *Statistical Yearbook of Iran 1401* (Tehran: SCI, 2023). A population entirely stripped of savings, forced to calibrate consumption against daily price movements, and deprived of economic security for any planning horizon beyond the immediate lacks the material preconditions for sustained political organisation—which is precisely the political function of inflation, converting catastrophic economic mismanagement into a highly effective instrument of political stabilisation.

[15] In cellular biology, autophagy is the orderly degradation and recycling of cellular components under nutrient deprivation or cellular stress. The political-economic homology is precise: the Islamic Republic, like an autophagic cell, maintains immediate viability by consuming structures—physical infrastructure, human capital, natural resource base, institutional trust—necessary for future recovery. Unlike an economic recession from a demand shock, from which recovery is possible once the exogenous pressure passes, a country whose infrastructure has degraded past economic repair, whose natural resource base has been permanently depleted, and whose educated population has emigrated does not recover from the cessation of pressure; it faces a permanently lower productive capacity. Cf. Robert Solow, "A Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 70, no. 1 (1956): 65–94.

[16] Iranian Ministry of Energy data, cited in M. Motagh et al., "Satellite Geodesy of the Zagros-Makran Transition Zone in Iran," *Geological Society Special Publication* 291 (2007): 261–279; and Farhad Yazdani and Ahmad Mousavi, "Groundwater Depletion and Land Subsidence in Iran," *Hydrogeology Journal* 25, no. 8 (2017): 2275–2288. Lake Urmia, once the sixth-largest salt lake in the world, lost approximately 90% of its surface area between 1995 and 2015 due to upstream agricultural diversion and groundwater extraction incentivised by regime agricultural subsidies favouring water-intensive crops in an arid region. The regime's willingness to deplete irreplaceable aquifers is the behaviour of an entity that does not expect to be held accountable for the long-run habitability of the territory it administers. Mathew Kostal, "Drying Lake Urmia," *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 30, no. 4 (2014): 567–582.

[17] Real per capita GDP in Iran peaked in 1976 and has not recovered to that level—a fifty-year economic stagnation with no historical parallel among oil-exporting economies. Iran possesses the world's second-largest natural gas reserves and fourth-largest oil reserves (BP, *Statistical Review of World Energy*, 2023), yet a majority of its population has experienced declining real wages for more than two decades. The difference between what the resource base should generate and what the population actually receives flows to the *bonyads*, the IRGC's economic empire, and the offshore accounts of the ruling class. World Bank, *Iran Economic Monitor* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023).

[18] The analogy to addiction is not merely rhetorical. Economic addiction to rent income has been formally modelled in resource economics as a path-dependent process: the longer a population is exposed to rent income as a substitute for earned income, the higher the institutional disruption cost of its withdrawal, and the more intense the political resistance to any reform threatening the rent stream. See Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty:*

Oil Booms and Petro-States (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 45–90. Economic liberalisation registers in the minds of the praetorian class not as a national opportunity but as an existential threat, because their economic existence depends entirely on the closed, politically mediated system. This dynamic was made explicit during the JCPOA period (2015–2018), when multiple IRGC commanders publicly opposed economic opening on the grounds that it would benefit domestic "liberal" actors at the IRGC's expense. Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, pp. 165–188.

PART III

The Apparatus of Violence and the Road Ahead

"Every step which leads from capitalism towards planning is necessarily
a step towards a more autocratic and therefore a less democratic system."
— Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944)

CHAPTER 5

The Political Economy of Coercion

This chapter analyses the Islamic Republic's repressive apparatus through the lens of incentives, transaction costs, and property theory. It examines the Basij militia as a dark labour market for violence—a Violence Arbitrage mechanism converting economically marginalised populations into instruments of class suppression. It analyses the mandatory hijab law as the most visible institutional statement of the state's ownership claim over the person. And it quantifies the epistemological haemorrhage produced by the regime's systematic war on intellectual independence—the emigration of an educated generation whose departure constitutes the free market's unambiguous verdict on the revolution's failures.

5.1 Violence Arbitrage and the Dark Labour Market

The maintenance of the predatory state at the intensity required by the Islamic Republic's architecture of total social control demands the total industrialisation of violence. Ordinary police forces, whose legitimacy rests on the rule of law and whose personnel have alternative employment options creating an upward wage floor, are insufficient instruments for the suppression of a society-wide political challenge. The Islamic Republic has accordingly developed a complementary repressive apparatus whose organisational logic is explicitly economic: it recruits from populations lacking the alternative opportunities that would make their participation in state violence costly, and compensates their service with benefits calibrated to exceed the opportunity cost of their loyalty.[1]

The *Basij* Organisation (*Sazman-e Basij-e Mostaz'afin*), formally a component of the IRGC's ground forces, functions in practice as a vast, geographically dispersed dark labour market for the domestically violent. By recruiting systematically from Iran's economically disenfranchised social layers—rural migrants to urban peripheries lacking social capital for professional advancement; young men from religious or tribal backgrounds who do not benefit from secular educational credentials; the working poor of cities like Ahvaz, Tabriz, and Zahedan whose economic options have been foreclosed by decades of regional neglect—the regime executes a strategy of **Violence Arbitrage** whose economic logic is as precise as its social consequences are devastating.[2]

The regime purchases loyalty and violence through tangible market distortions: university admission quotas giving *Basij* members priority over non-*Basij* applicants with superior academic credentials; civil service hiring preferences; access to consumer goods at subsidised prices through *Basij* cooperative stores; legal immunity from prosecution for violence committed in the regime's service; and informal network access through which business licences, government contracts, and housing allocations are mediated. This transaction explicitly commodifies betrayal, converting neighbourhood community into an economic arrangement in which the *Basij* member's upward mobility is structurally tethered to the continued suppression of the neighbours from whose community he was recruited.[3]

5.2 The Nationalisation of the Body: Self-Ownership Annihilated in Law

In the libertarian framework developed through Locke, Spencer, and Rothbard, the distinction between economic liberties and civil liberties is not two distinct categories requiring separate justification but a single unified right of Self-Ownership expressed in two domains.[4] The Islamic Republic's invasive social micromanagement of private behaviour represents the final stage in the totalisation of its property claim over the person: having confiscated the economic fruits of the citizen's labour through taxation and inflation, and the political products of the citizen's mind through censorship and juridical incapacitation, it proceeds to the confiscation of bodily sovereignty itself.

Nowhere is the ontological claim of state ownership over the person more legally explicit than in the mandatory *hijab* law, which functions not primarily as a religious regulation—a genuine religious obligation would apply to believers and exempt non-believers—but as a universal property marking, the branding of every woman's body to denote state ownership regardless of the subject's own religious convictions.[5]

The Mahsa Amini uprising of September 2022—ignited by the death in morality police custody of a 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman, lasting approximately seven months, spreading to every province, producing a documented death toll of at least 530 protesters—is the clearest demonstration of what the Iranian population understands about the mandatory hijab law that Western analysts who treat it as a "cultural issue" do not: it is the most physically intimate and quotidian instantiation of the claim that the state, not the individual, owns the person.[6]

5.2.1 The Exile of the Mind: The Epistemological Haemorrhage

The war on intellectual independence and civic authenticity produces its most measurable and irreversible consequence in catastrophic human capital flight. The IMF calculated that Iran has the highest rate of highly skilled emigration relative to total skilled population of any country in its comparative sample—a ranking derived from data through the 2000s that has deteriorated substantially in the 2010s and 2020s, with accelerating departures following

each successive protest wave.[7] Each medical specialist who emigrates to Germany, Canada, or Australia takes with her the eighteen years of educational investment—funded substantially by Iranian public resources during the free-public-education phase of her training—and deposits it permanently in the receiving economy. The Islamic Republic has achieved a perverse and historically unprecedented feat: it has converted the Iranian educational system into a subsidy for the human capital stocks of precisely the "imperialist" economies its ideology requires it to oppose. What remains is a state managed by the incompetent, policing the impoverished, atop an infrastructure simultaneously physically and intellectually collapsing.

CHAPTER 6

The January 2026 Massacre: When the Parasite Destroys the Host

This chapter confronts the catastrophic reality of the Islamic Republic in the winter of 2025–2026 directly and without euphemism. It documents the regime's crossing of the threshold separating predatory governance from outright eliminationism—the qualitative transition from a system that loots the population to one that liquidates it. It analyses the January 2026 events as the consummation of a forty-seven-year institutional trajectory, the external military intervention of February 2026 as a praxeologically justified exogenous shock, and the moral and strategic imperative of total structural dismantlement.

6.1 The Threshold of Extermination

The limit-case of totalitarianism is reached not when the state is most powerful but when it is most desperate—when the mathematical relationship between the cost of extracting obedience and the remaining exploitable wealth of the subject population inverts, and the calculus of continued parasitism turns negative. Every predatory system faces this structural constraint: the parasite that destroys the host loses its own survival conditions. In the winter of 2025–2026, the Islamic Republic crossed this threshold with the unmistakable precision of a physical phase transition.[8]

As the rial breached 1.4 million per US dollar—a depreciation exceeding 99.7% from its pre-revolutionary purchasing power, and more than 3,000% against the dollar since the reimposition of comprehensive sanctions—the last coherent structures of the domestic supply chain for essential commodities disintegrated. Household caloric intake in the bottom three quintiles of the income distribution had, according to Iranian parliamentary research centre reports, declined below nutritional adequacy thresholds in multiple provinces for the first time since the famine conditions of the 1980–1988 war. The productive population had no more physical capital left to be looted. The host was no longer yielding sufficient nutrition to sustain the parasite's energy expenditure in maintaining order.[9]

Deprived of its extractable economic host, the state underwent the institutional mutation that predatory systems exhibit at this juncture: it abandoned the pretence of governance—the

minimum provision of public order, infrastructure, and services maintaining the population's residual investment in the system's survival—and pivoted entirely to a logic of outright extermination. The former subject population was reclassified from a resource to be managed to an enemy to be eliminated.[10]

6.2 January 8–9, 2026: The Architecture of a Massacre

The events of 8–9 January 2026 represent not a spontaneous eruption but the consummation of a structural crisis whose preconditions had been accumulating across three preceding protest waves, each broader and more geographically uniform than the last. They must be understood as the logical terminus of a forty-seven-year institutional trajectory—the point at which the regime's internal contradictions between praetorian class maintenance and population survival achieved catastrophic resolution.

The immediate trigger was the collapse of the bread subsidy in seventeen provinces simultaneously on 4 January 2026, following the Central Bank's inability to maintain the official exchange rate for wheat imports after the exhaustion of its hard currency reserves. In the forty-eight hours that followed, staple food prices in affected markets doubled. On the morning of January 8th, protests ignited in the historic Grand Bazaar of Tehran—the symbolic heart of the merchant class whose 1979 revolt against the Shah had made the Islamic revolution possible, now destroyed by the system it had helped create—and spread within six hours to all thirty-one provinces through a distributed, leaderless communication architecture operating across Telegram channels, encrypted group messaging, and word-of-mouth networks that the regime's intelligence apparatus had not succeeded in mapping.[11]

The simultaneity of the January 8th protests across all thirty-one provinces was not coincidental. It was the product of months of quiet coordination across the encrypted infrastructure of a civil society whose organisational density the regime's intelligence apparatus had systematically underestimated. The preference-falsification equilibrium—the stable authoritarian arrangement in which public silence masks private opposition, preventing any single dissident from knowing that their willingness to resist is widely shared—collapsed faster than any single security apparatus could manage.[12]

6.3 The Communications Blackout and the Tactics of Eliminationism

The regime's response, initiated within four hours of the first confirmed multi-province reports reaching IRGC Intelligence Headquarters, followed the template established in November 2019—with crucial, qualitative differences that mark the transition from suppression to eliminationism.

On the evening of January 8th, the Telecommunications Infrastructure Company executed a total withdrawal from international BGP routing tables, severing Iran's connection to the

global internet. Simultaneously, domestic mobile networks in all thirty-one provinces were reduced to voice-only at severely degraded capacity, and the National Information Network's internal routing was reconfigured to prevent interprovincial traffic routing through civilian ISP infrastructure. The blackout was more comprehensive than any preceding shutdown, eliminating not only international communications but the domestic VPN infrastructure that had partially mitigated previous shutdowns.[13]

Under this communications blackout—which lasted eleven days, the longest in the Islamic Republic's history, and which the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression immediately characterised as a deliberate act designed to mask violence from international observation—the regime deployed operational assets that exceeded by a qualitative threshold anything previously used against a domestic protest population.

The summary execution of protesters and medical personnel in the corridors of general hospitals by IRGC plainclothes units—documented in eleven facilities across six provinces by nursing staff who used concealed personal devices operating over the degraded domestic network to record and later transmit evidence—represents the final and most legally unambiguous dimension of the January massacre. In each documented case, individuals were identified by IRGC Intelligence as having participated in protests, pursued into hospital facilities where they had sought treatment for injuries, and executed without judicial process in the presence of civilian medical personnel.[14]

The total death toll from the January 2026 operations, compiled from multiple independent documentation streams under the condition of information blackout, is estimated at between 30,000 and 36,500 killed—making it the bloodiest domestic suppression operation in the Islamic Republic's history, vastly exceeding even the 1988 prison massacres in compressed temporal and geographic intensity.[15]

30,000–36,500

Estimated killed in the January 2026 Massacre—the bloodiest domestic suppression in the Islamic Republic's history. Eleven days of total communications blackout masked the violence from international observation.

6.4 The Anatomy of Eliminationism: Why January 2026 Differs Qualitatively

The January 2026 operations differ from all previous Islamic Republic suppression events not merely quantitatively—more deaths, longer blackout, heavier weapons—but qualitatively, in ways that carry decisive analytical and moral implications.

Previous suppression operations were characterised by the logic of *exemplary violence*: the

selective killing of individuals at the margin of protest activity sufficiently visible to deter future participation, preserving the bulk of the population as an exploitable economic substrate. The 1988 massacres, the 2009 Kahrizak atrocities, the 2019 and 2022 street killings all exhibit this logic. Violent enough to deter; controlled enough to preserve the taxable population.

The January 2026 operations exhibit the logic of *eliminationism*: the deliberate targeting of populations—not merely protest leaders or organisers but the medical personnel treating the wounded, the shelter operators providing refuge, the journalists attempting to document—whose continued biological existence the regime has determined represents an existential threat independent of their individual political activity. This is the precise distinction that Valentino draws between mass killing as a suppression tool and mass killing as a political solution.[16]

The targeted arrest of individuals who had already withdrawn from protest activities, and the documented execution of wounded persons in medical facilities collectively indicate an operational objective beyond the suppression of the immediate protest: the systematic destruction of the organisational and social capacity of the opposition as a durable structure, the elimination of the social substrate from which future resistance could emerge.

This analytical determination carries a precise moral implication, which the libertarian tradition has anticipated. Rothbard acknowledged explicitly that "when a State has been governed in a particularly tyrannous manner, where people have been robbed and tyrannized for years, then surely the citizens have the right to rise up and overthrow the State."[17] The Islamic Republic's transition from extraction to eliminationism—from tyranny to massacre—activates this right in its fullest form. It simultaneously activates the analytical obligation to confront, without evasion, the question of what can end it.

6.5 Operation Epic Fury: The Praxeology of Exogenous Shock

It is strictly within this grim calculus of physical survival that the events of late February 2026 must be analysed. The launch of joint US-Israeli precision military operations—systematically eliminating the IRGC's command-and-control infrastructure, destroying the hardened missile and drone silos whose construction had absorbed decades of Iranian state resources, and successfully targeting the Supreme Leader's crisis command facility—shattered the regime's supreme and previously unbroken structural advantage: its monopoly on catastrophic, organised violence within Iranian territory.[18]

By eliminating the command infrastructure through which senior IRGC figures directed the suppression apparatus, and by demonstrating to every colonel and major in the Revolutionary Guards that the invincibility narrative on which their willingness to kill was partly conditioned was a fiction, the February strikes accomplished what four decades of passive resistance and economic pressure could not: they shattered the cognitive and institutional preconditions of willing enforcement. The IRGC colonel who has spent his career under the assumption of sovereign impunity does not maintain that assumption when precision

munitions have eliminated his superior's command post.[19]

6.6 The Imperative of Total Dismantlement

With the state's defensive membrane cracked from the outside by the February strikes and from the inside by coordinated resistance whose organisational infrastructure had been patiently built through years of underground work, the burden of historical completion falls on the Iranian civil resistance and the emerging institutions of the liberated zones to accomplish the dismantlement from within.

The era of the shadow economy must evolve into the era of the **Counter-State**: not merely practices bypassing the regime's laws while leaving its institutional architecture intact, but an affirmative reconstruction project building the legitimate institutions of self-governance, market exchange, and civic life on the physical and social ruins of the collapsed predatory system.[20]

The enforcer class, suddenly cut off from central command and confronting a population empowered by the external destruction of the apex authority, must be made to understand with rapid clarity that the cost of continued enforcement against the population far exceeds any residual benefit. This is not primarily a military calculation but an economic one, grounded in the same incentive structure that made the apparatus of enforcement possible in the first place: when the privileges that made enforcement economically rational have been destroyed by the collapse of the system those privileges required, the rational calculation of every remaining enforcer shifts toward defection. The historical dynamics of enforcement collapse—Romania 1989, East Germany 1989, Iraq 2003—all confirm that the solidity of a coercive apparatus is overwhelmingly dependent on the perceived permanence of the apex authority it serves. When that permanence has been publicly shattered, the cascade of defection is faster than any deliberate strategic plan could produce.[21]

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The Islamic Republic was not built in a day nor in a decade; it was constructed across nearly five decades of patient institutional engineering, ideological manufacture, and the systematic elimination of every alternative centre of power, wealth, and moral authority within Iranian society. The January 2026 Massacre was not an aberration from this trajectory; it was its logical culmination, the point at which the system's internal contradictions achieved catastrophic resolution. What the February 2026 intervention accomplished—and what the

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internal resistance must complete—is the compression of the institutional destruction into a timeframe that corresponds to the physical survival of a population in the process of being eliminated.

A mechanism designed for predation that has transitioned to eliminationism has forfeited every claim to the institutional deference the international order extends to sovereign states. It has forfeited the right to the protection of borders it uses not to defend its population but to trap them. It has forfeited the right to immunity from external intervention that sovereignty implies, because sovereignty implies representation of the territorial population, and a regime that is shooting that population in hospital corridors is not representing it but hunting it.

The praxeological imperative, derived from the foundational axiom of Self-Ownership and its implication that defensive force against ongoing aggression is not merely permitted but required by justice, is accordingly clear: the dismantlement of the remaining coercive apparatus of the Islamic Republic is not merely the legitimate interest of the Iranian people but their moral obligation to themselves, to the generations who died in its prisons, to the 530 killed in 2022, to the 30,000–36,500 killed in January 2026, and to the generations who will inherit the civilisational substrate it has spent four decades consuming.

> *Freedom is not inherited; it is repossessed. The Islamic Republic was not an accident of history—it was the constructed product of specific human choices, specific institutional designs, and specific intellectual failures whose anatomy this work has attempted to provide with praxeological precision. It can be unmade because it was made. It will be unmade because the human desire for self-ownership is not extinguishable by any quantity of violence, however systematic. The January 2026 Massacre did not extinguish that desire; it made its fulfilment a categorical moral imperative for every person of conscience inside and outside Iranian territory. The only question remaining to be settled is the cost at which the unmaking occurs—and that cost is determined by the clarity with which those who seek liberation understand the precise nature of what they are dismantling, and the exactness with which they aim.*

Notes

[1]The economic analysis of the supply of repressive labour is developed in Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 51–120. The optimal winning coalition for a repressive authoritarian is small enough that the per-member allocation of private goods is high enough to incentivise loyalty, yet large enough to provide sufficient physical coercive capacity to suppress the excluded majority.

[2]Golkar, *Captive Society*, pp. 113–160, reconstructs the *Basij*'s demographic composition through interviews and statistical analysis of protest casualty data, finding active service members consistently lower income, lower education, and more rurally originated than the populations they are deployed to suppress. This is Violence Arbitrage in operation: purchasing violence from the population for whom the economic benefits of membership are largest relative to opportunity cost, and deploying it against the population for whom those benefits would be smallest. The *Basij* claimed an official strength of approximately 12 million members, with active forces estimated by Golkar at 90,000–300,000. The January 2026 massacre required the activation of approximately 35,000–50,000 active *Basij* supplemented by IRGC special operations units, Iran Electronic Warfare Corps assets for communications interdiction, and Quds Force veterans redeployed from Syria and Iraq.

[3]Golkar, *Captive Society*, pp. 165–205. The legal immunity dimension is documented in Amnesty International, *Iran: Impunity for Violence against Protesters* (London: Amnesty International, 2020), documenting the systematic failure to prosecute *Basij* and IRGC members for documented killings of protesters across multiple uprising waves. During the January 2026 operations, legal immunity was extended by special decree to all personnel engaged in "counterterrorism operations" within the National Information Network blackout zone—a designation applied retroactively to all thirty-one provinces—making accountability for crimes committed during the massacre structurally impossible within the domestic legal system.

[4]Rothbard: "The distinction between 'economic freedom' and 'personal freedom' is a myth perpetrated by the interventionist liberals." Murray N. Rothbard, *Power and Market: Government and the Economy*, 2nd ed. (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977), p. 238. The self-ownership axiom generates property rights in one's own body (the basis of civil liberties) and in the fruits of one's own productive activity (the basis of economic liberties) through a single logical derivation, making them indivisible in theory however much they are distinguished in political practice.

[5]The mandatory *hijab* law (Article 638 of the 1991 Islamic Penal Code) applies to all women in public spaces regardless of religious identity, including foreign nationals and recognised religious minorities whose own traditions impose no such requirement. This universality reveals that the law's function is not the enforcement of Islamic personal obligation but the assertion of state authority over the public presentation of all female bodies within Iranian territory. The compulsory veil stripped of theological pretext represents a violent negation of the most basic dimension of self-ownership: the right to determine the physical presentation of one's own body. The criminal penalties for "bad hijab" (*bad-hejabi*)—fines, arrest, lashing—constitute a criminal tariff on

non-compliance with the state's ownership claim. See Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), pp. 185–215.

[6]The death toll is documented across multiple sources: Amnesty International's *Crushing Humanity* report (2023) documented at least 530 confirmed deaths; Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) documented 537 killed, including 49 children. The uprising's significance was not only its scale but its explicit framing around bodily autonomy—"Woman, Life, Freedom" (*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*)—which translated the Austrian axiom of self-ownership into street-level political demand. The regime's formal "suspension" of the *Gasht-e Ershad* in late 2022 under pressure represented a tactical withdrawal; by 2024, hijab enforcement had been redistributed to IRGC plainclothes units and new digital surveillance infrastructure, the enforcement less visible but no less coercive. By January 2026, the morality apparatus had been operationally reconstituted in more aggressive form, its targets expanded to include participants in the December 2025 economic protests.

[7]IMF Working Paper No. 09/109, *Explaining the Brain Drain from Iran* (Washington, DC: IMF, 2009), calculated Iran's highly skilled emigration ratio at approximately 25%—the highest in the IMF's 50-country sample. An estimated 150,000–180,000 highly educated Iranians emigrate annually under normal conditions, rising dramatically in post-crisis periods. The 2022–2023 uprising produced documented spikes in applications for Canadian, German, and British immigration programmes. The January 2026 massacre accelerated this trend to an estimated 250,000–300,000 departures in the six months following, including unprecedented departures of medical specialists, judges who resigned in protest, and members of the cultural and journalistic community. OECD, *International Migration Outlook* (Paris: OECD, 2026).

[8]The ecological analogy of parasite-host relationship and optimal virulence is developed in Robert May and Martin Nowak, "Superinfection, Metapopulation Dynamics, and the Evolution of Diversity," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 170, no. 1 (1994): 95–114, for the evolutionary biology; and in Mancur Olson, *Power and Prosperity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 1–24, for the political-economic parallel. The "stationary bandit" model predicts that the rational predator maximises tax revenues while providing just enough security to prevent the destruction of taxable assets by others. The Islamic Republic's January 2026 operations represent the breakdown of this optimal equilibrium: the marginal cost of suppression had exceeded the remaining marginal revenue from the population, triggering a transition to eliminationism that is, in Valentino's framework, a rational strategy chosen when the costs of managing or suppressing opposition exceed the costs of its physical elimination. Benjamin Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 1–31.

[9]Iranian parliamentary reports on poverty and food security documented deteriorating nutritional outcomes across low-income households since 2018, with the Research Centre of the Islamic Consultative Assembly publishing reports in 2021, 2023, and December 2025 noting that the share of household income spent on food had risen above 55% in the lower-income deciles—a threshold economists treat as the boundary condition for structural food insecurity. The December 2025 report was suppressed by the Ministry of Interior within 48 hours of publication; its data had already circulated through encrypted channels and provided the statistical context for the December 2025 protests that preceded the January uprising. The 2025 currency collapse was driven by a combination of accelerated sanctions enforcement targeting IRGC oil sales, the collapse of informal hawala channels used to repatriate oil revenues, and domestic money creation to finance the fiscal deficit of a state whose non-oil revenues had become structurally insufficient.

[10]The theoretical literature on the transition from extractive to eliminationist state behaviour is developed in Valentino, *Final Solutions*, pp. 1–31. The "dispossessive mass killing" model is particularly apposite: a dominant group seeking to maintain control of economic resources concludes that elimination of the competing claimant population is cheaper than continued suppression. The Islamic Republic's trajectory fits this model: as the economic surplus available for distribution to the coercive apparatus shrank, the size of the suppressed population

that could be credibly managed also shrank, creating the conditions for the transition to eliminationism that culminated in January 2026.

[11] The Grand Bazaar's symbolic valence is significant. The Iranian merchant class (*bazaari*) has historically been the most politically decisive domestic constituency in Iranian politics: it was *bazaari* capital and organisation that funded the 1979 revolution, and *bazaari* disillusionment with the Islamic Republic's economic management that provided crucial early legitimacy for subsequent protest waves. By January 2026, the Tehran Grand Bazaar had lost an estimated 40% of its active commercial tenants since 2012, with the surviving merchants' profit margins compressed to survival-level by the exchange rate collapse. The politicisation of this constituency—the last economic constituency with both the organisational density and the national symbolic weight to serve as an uprising anchor—represented a qualitative shift from the regime's previous suppression calculations.

[12] Kuran's cascade model predicts precisely this dynamics: once visible defection exceeds a threshold—when it becomes publicly observable that resistance is common rather than isolated—the rational calculation of every remaining conformist shifts in favour of defection, because the collective enforcement capacity sustaining the conformity equilibrium has dissolved. Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies*, pp. 247–276. The encrypted communication infrastructure developed in response to the 2019 and 2022 shutdowns provided precisely the coordination mechanism Kuran's model identifies as the requirement for cascade: a way of making resistance visible to potential resisters without making it visible to the security apparatus simultaneously.

[13] The technical architecture of Iran's January 2026 communications shutdown surpassed the November 2019 precedent in both comprehensiveness and speed of implementation. NetBlocks and the Internet Society documented total internet traffic collapse within 180 minutes of the initial BGP withdrawal, with domestic traffic reduced to the National Information Network's walled-garden services (state television streaming, government payment platforms, IRIB radio). The IRGC Electronic Warfare Corps' deployment of mobile L7-DPI units in provincial capitals to intercept and block satellite uplink attempts—including Starlink terminals whose proliferation had been facilitated by foreign opposition networks—represented a significant capability escalation. Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net: Iran Special Emergency Report* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, January 2026).

[14] The hospital executions are documented in the testimony of nursing staff collected by Amnesty International's Iran team, which received 47 independent testimonies from personnel across eleven hospitals in Tehran, Isfahan, Ahvaz, Rasht, Tabriz, and Zahedan. The testimonies are consistent with respect to the operational details: IRGC intelligence units arriving with photographs or biometric identification matching hospitalised patients, IRGC commanders overruling medical personnel's protests, and executions occurring in corridors, operating antechambers, and in one case in an intensive care unit. Amnesty International, *Iran: January 2026 Hospital Executions—Preliminary Evidence Report* (London: Amnesty International, February 2026). This pattern was corroborated by Iran Human Rights, which received numerous reports of wounded individuals being "finished off" in medical facilities. See IHRNGO, *At Least 3428 Protesters Killed in Iran; Serious Risk of Protester Executions* (Oslo: IHRNGO, 14 January 2026). The operations constitute extrajudicial killings in a protected medical setting, falling under multiple categories of war crimes and crimes against humanity in international humanitarian law.

[15] The death toll estimate derives from four independent compilation methodologies: (1) the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center's name-by-name documentation, which reached 1,847 confirmed deaths by April 2026 with verification ongoing; (2) hospital burial record analysis conducted by the International Forensic Centre (IFC) in cities where partial records became available; (3) satellite imagery analysis of hastily excavated mass burial sites identified in the peripheries of Tehran, Isfahan, and Ahvaz; and (4) aggregation of provincial local source reports by *Iran International*'s monitoring network. The methodological variance between approaches produces the wide confidence interval. The Islamic Republic's official figure of "fewer than 200" deaths in "legitimate

counterterrorism operations" is consistent with the pattern of systematic undercounting documented across all previous suppression waves and carries no evidential credibility. UN Human Rights Council, *Special Session on Iran: January 2026 Events* (Geneva: UNHRC, 15 March 2026).

[16] Valentino, *Final Solutions*, pp. 64–91. The operational targeting of medical personnel represents the most legally unambiguous indicator of the shift from suppression to eliminationism. Medical personnel who treat protest wounded occupy no political role; they cannot lead future uprisings; their elimination serves no suppression function in the conventional sense. Their targeting makes sense only within an eliminationist logic in which the goal is the comprehensive destruction of the social infrastructure of opposition—the networks of trust, professional solidarity, and mutual aid through which a population sustains organised resistance over time.

[17] Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty*, p. 189. The transition from the right to resist to the right to receive assistance in resisting follows from the same Self-Ownership axiom: if the individual possesses the right of defensive force against an aggressor, and if material conditions necessary for the exercise of that right can only be provided by external actors, then the provision of that assistance is not an initiation of force but the facilitation of legitimate defensive action.

[18] For operational details of the February 28, 2026 strikes (Operation Epic Fury), see UK House of Commons Library, *US/Israel-Iran conflict 2026* (London: Parliament, 31 March 2026). The praxeological analysis of military intervention as a response to totalitarian predation has a distinguished intellectual lineage within the libertarian tradition that non-interventionists frequently overlook. Randolph Bourne's dictum that "war is the health of the state" refers to wars of imperial expansion; it does not address the praxeology of intervention to shatter an existing totalitarian state's monopoly on violence within its captive territory. Hans-Hermann Hoppe, *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism* (Boston: Kluwer, 1989), pp. 130–155, provides the framework for distinguishing aggressive from defensive intervention, the latter being permissible under the Non-Aggression Principle (NAP) when directed at terminating an ongoing aggressor's capacity for continued aggression. Part IV addresses the NAP objection directly.

[19] The psychology of enforcement collapse in totalitarian systems under conditions of apex authority destruction is documented in historical cases. The rapid dissolution of the Romanian *Securitate* following military defection from Ceauşescu in December 1989, and the collapse of the East German Stasi's operational capacity following the opening of the Berlin Wall, both exhibit the pattern: once the apex signals inability to protect enforcers, enforcement loyalty dissolves rapidly because the economic calculation sustaining it has changed. Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (2003): 178–256. The parallel with the February 2026 strikes is not perfect—external military pressure differs from internal elite defection—but the mechanism of enforcement dissolution is structurally analogous.

[20] Samuel Huntington's analysis of institutional development in *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 1–92, argues that the stability and legitimacy of post-revolutionary political orders depends on the speed and depth of institution-building, not merely on the defeat of the ancien régime. The Iranian underground's task is not merely to complete the regime's physical destruction but to have already begun—in the legal committees, the economic self-organisation networks, and the civic councils of the resistance—the construction of the institutions that will govern afterward. The historical precedents—the liberated zones of the French Resistance after D-Day, the civic institutions that emerged in East Germany following the Wende—suggest that the transition from liberation to stable self-governance requires alternative institutional infrastructure to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the authoritarian apparatus immediately, before the vacuum creates conditions for a new authoritarian consolidation. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), pp. 13–62.

[21] Timur Kuran's cascade model applies here with equal force: the preference-falsification equilibrium sus-

taining enforcer loyalty dissolves when visible defection becomes common enough that continued enforcement becomes individually irrational. Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies*, pp. 247–280. The operational implication is that the resistance's most important strategic objective in the post-strike environment is not the elimination of enforcers but the maximisation of the *visibility* of defection among enforcers, to accelerate the cascade that makes continued enforcement self-defeating. The IRGC officers who removed their insignia during the collapse of the Rasht and Isfahan provincial commands in March 2026 represented precisely this visible threshold-crossing whose consequences rippled outward through the remaining enforcement structure.

PART IV

The Defence: Demolishing Objections to the Abolitionist Case

"A man is not refuted by having objections raised against what he says;
he is refuted only when his argument has been shown to be defective
at its foundation—when the ground upon which it stands is demonstrated to be sand."
— Adapted from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Every serious argument generates its opposing literature, and the analysis developed in Parts I through III of this work is no exception. The abolitionist case—the contention that the regime is not merely bad governance but constitutively predatory, structurally unreformable, and morally disqualified from the protections that sovereignty ordinarily implies—attracts three categories of objection that command enough intellectual respectability to warrant systematic engagement. Part IV does not caricature these objections in order to dismiss them cheaply. It states each in its strongest possible form, identifies the empirical evidence and philosophical premises on which it rests, and then demonstrates why and where each fails.

CHAPTER 7

The Myth of the Originary Wound: Demolishing the 1953 Coup Thesis

The most widely deployed academic defence of the Islamic Republic's hostility toward the West traces its origins to the so-called 1953 CIA-assisted coup removing Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. This chapter demolishes that thesis at its foundation. The events of August 1953 were not a foreign coup against a democrat but the lawful constitutional dismissal of an authoritarian populist who had destroyed the Iranian economy, dissolved the parliament he could not control, and surrounded himself with Soviet-backed communist allies. Furthermore, the Islamic Republic's hostility toward the West is not a reactive posture generated by this manufactured grievance; it is a constitutive ideological commitment rooted in the theological categories of kufr, nafy-e sabil, jihad, and taghout, operational in Khomeini's thought a decade before Mossadegh's removal.

7.1 The Objection Stated in Its Strongest Form

The standard academic argument proceeds as follows. In August 1953, a CIA-coordinated operation (Operation Ajax) orchestrated the removal of the "democratically elected" Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after he nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The resulting consolidation of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's power, backed by the United States, created an authoritarian client state that suppressed political development, generating a legitimate, grievance-based revolution in 1979. The subsequent Islamic Republic's hostility toward the United States is accordingly the institutionalised memory of a political wound inflicted by American imperial policy. Engage the wound, the argument continues, engage the regime, and the hostility will diminish.[1]

7.2 The Demagogue and the Destruction of the Constitutional Order

The fundamental premise of the victimhood narrative—that Mossadegh was a "democratically elected" leader unjustly overthrown—is a historiographical fabrication. Mossadegh was not elected by the Iranian people; under the 1906 Fundamental Laws, prime ministers were

appointed by the Shah subject to a Majlis vote of inclination. His popular legitimacy derived from parliamentary support, not direct democratic mandate.

Once in power, Mossadegh did not act as the avatar of Iranian democracy. He functioned as a populist demagogue who systematically dismantled Iran's constitutional order when that order became an obstacle to his continued dominance. Having lost the support of the moderate clerical establishment—including Ayatollah Kashani, who had been among his most important early backers—and the mercantile class, Mossadegh resorted to naked authoritarianism. He suspended the Senate. He halted elections to the 17th Majlis as soon as urban voting was complete, deliberately disenfranchising the rural provinces where his opposition was strongest. He demanded and received extra-constitutional decree powers, governing by fiat.[2]

In August 1953, facing a Majlis that had finally rebelled against his dictatorial overreach, Mossadegh orchestrated its destruction through a fraudulent national plebiscite. The referendum featured separate polling locations for "Yes" and "No" votes, abolishing the secret ballot and ensuring the physical intimidation of anyone attempting to vote against dissolution. Armed affiliates of the Soviet-backed Tudeh Party and Mossadegh's own National Front physically blocked opposition voters. The official result—a 99.9% approval for dissolution—carried all the statistical credibility of a Soviet show election.[3] It was this unconstitutional dissolution of the Majlis that triggered Mossadegh's lawful dismissal. Under the 1906 Constitution, when the Majlis was not in session, the Shah possessed the sovereign prerogative to dismiss the Prime Minister and appoint a successor. On August 13th, Mohammad Reza Shah issued a *firman* legally dismissing Mossadegh and appointing General Fazlollah Zahedi. Mossadegh's response—arresting the commanding officer delivering the decree and launching a crackdown against political opponents—was the unconstitutional act. The "coup" of 1953 was not initiated by the CIA against Mossadegh; it was initiated by Mossadegh against the Iranian Constitution.

7.3 The "CIA Coup" Fiction and the Domestic Reality

The outsized role attributed to the CIA in Mossadegh's downfall is one of the most successful disinformation campaigns of the Cold War, retroactively embraced by both the American intelligence establishment (eager to claim omnipotence) and the Islamic Republic (eager to claim perpetual victimhood). The empirical reality is vastly different.

The initial CIA-MI6 plan notoriously failed. When Mossadegh refused the Shah's legal decree on August 15th, the CIA's Iranian network panicked, the primary operative Kermit Roosevelt considered the mission aborted, and the Shah temporarily fled to Rome. What occurred between August 16th and 19th was not a masterminded intelligence operation but an organic, domestic Iranian uprising. The clerical establishment, terrified by Mossadegh's alliance with the communist Tudeh Party; the *bazaari* merchants, financially ruined by his economic mismanagement; and the rank-and-file of the Iranian military, loyal to the monarchy,

flooded the streets of Tehran without CIA coordination.[4]

7.4 The Economic Catastrophe of Irrational Nationalisation

Mossadegh's nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951 was executed with maximum ideological fervour and zero economic realism. By refusing multiple equitable compromise offers from the World Bank and the British government—offers that would have secured the *principle* of nationalisation while maintaining the technical and commercial infrastructure necessary for oil exports—Mossadegh triggered a global embargo on Iranian oil. Iran lacked the technical personnel to operate the Abadan refinery, the tanker fleet to export crude, and the international legal standing to sell it. Oil revenues fell from an average of approximately $50 million annually to virtually zero.[5] Mossadegh was not a martyr to Iranian sovereignty; he was an economic illiterate who sacrificed the material well-being of his nation on the altar of his own political vanity. His removal did not truncate Iranian progress; it saved Iran from becoming a Soviet satellite state in a period when Soviet penetration of Iran through the Tudeh Party was active, documented, and advancing.

In the decades following his lawful dismissal, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi orchestrated one of the most rapid periods of socio-economic modernisation in twentieth-century history: unprecedented GDP growth, secular legal codes, land reform, female enfranchisement, rapid industrialisation, and literacy rates rising from under 15% to over 60% between 1953 and 1978. The myth of 1953 as originary wound was retroactively weaponised precisely because the Islamists and Marxists could not defeat the Shah on the merits of economic performance; they required an originary sin to justify their reactionary assault on a rapidly developing, secularising nation.[6]

7.5 The Chronological Absurdity: Why Not Begin with the Sasanids?

Even accepting the historical fiction of the 1953 CIA coup, its deployment as the explanatory root of the Islamic Republic's hostility is analytically bankrupt. The selection of 1953 as the originary moment of Iranian-Western conflict is a motivated analytical choice that serves the thesis it is deployed to support.[7]

The answer, which the 1953 thesis cannot provide but the theological analysis can, is that the Islamic Republic's foreign policy is not organised around the historical map of Western interventions against Iran at all. It is organised around a theological geography of *kufr* (unbelief) and *iman* (belief), in which the United States and Israel occupy the position of primary adversaries because of what they represent in the cosmological framework structuring Khomeini's political theology.[8]

7.6 The Theological Engine: *Kufr*, *Nafy-e Sabil*, *Jihad*, and *Taghout*

Western academics who invoke 1953 as the originary grievance reveal a profound ignorance of the theological categories actually organising Khomeini's political thought. These categories are operative from his earliest political writings, prior to any American intervention in Iranian affairs.

Kufr—disbelief, the state of being outside the community of genuine Islamic faith—is the foundational category. The United States is the adversary not because it helped remove Mossadegh but because it is the leading power of *Dar al-Kufr* in the contemporary world. *Nafy-e sabil*—the Quranic prohibition on allowing unbelievers to gain authority over Muslims—is the juridical mechanism driving this hostility, operative in Khomeini's 1942 work *Kashf al-Asrar* a decade before the Mossadegh crisis. *Jihad* and *Taghout* provide the active prescriptive content: in the 1970 *Hukumat-e Islami* lectures, Khomeini calls for the overthrow of all non-Islamic governments. The United States is *taghout*—a false idol—because its political system claims legitimacy from democratic consent rather than divine sovereignty.[9]

7.7 The Hostage Crisis and the Export of Revolution: Evidence from Practice

The chronology of the Islamic Republic's actions in its first months further dismantles the grievance thesis. On 4 November 1979, militant students seized the American embassy. They did not describe their action in the language of national grievance regarding 1953; they framed it in the language of *taghout*, characterising the embassy as the "den of spies," a manifestation of *kufr* on Islamic soil. The Carter administration had pressured the Shah on human rights and had not opposed the revolution; the hostages were held for 444 days regardless. The action was an ideological performance, not a reactive retaliation.[10]

CHAPTER 8

The Engagement Fallacy: Why Commerce Cannot Liberalise a Constitutively Predatory State

The claim that economic engagement with the Islamic Republic would, over time, produce domestic constituencies for openness and reform is the most empirically falsified hypothesis in four decades of Iran policy debate. The JCPOA test case (2015–2018) provided near-ideal conditions for this hypothesis to be verified; the economic relief was captured entirely by the praetorian class while IRGC operations expanded. The Islamic Republic has no independent commercial class to be liberalised; its engagement produces not market pluralism but additional caloric intake for an addicted predator.

8.1 The Objection in Its Strongest Form

Among the more intellectually earnest objections to a confrontational posture toward the Islamic Republic comes from within the libertarian and non-interventionist tradition itself. The argument proceeds in two steps: first, that the removal of economic sanctions and integration of the Islamic Republic into the global economy would dissolve its authoritarian character by creating domestic constituencies for openness; and second, that these constituencies would then exert internal pressure on the regime toward political liberalisation analogous to the transformation of China, Vietnam, and the Eastern Bloc economies through commercial integration.[11]

8.2 The JCPOA Test Case: Engagement Without Liberalisation

The engagement thesis has been tested under near-ideal conditions and has failed. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action provided the Islamic Republic with the unfreezing of approximately $50–100 billion in previously sanctioned assets and the lifting of oil export restrictions. If the engagement thesis were correct, this substantial injection of resources should have strengthened Iranian civil society and produced political pressure for liberalisation.[12]

What actually occurred was precisely the opposite. The economic relief of the JCPOA period (2015–2018) was captured almost entirely by the praetorian class. The funds flowed to the IRGC's economic empire, the *bonyad* network, and the Supreme Leader's *Setad* conglomerate through the same institutional mechanisms documented in Part II—mechanisms whose design ensures that any capital entering the Iranian economy through state-controlled channels flows first to state-linked entities. Simultaneously, IRGC operations across the Middle East in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen expanded dramatically during the JCPOA period, the additional economic resources flowing directly into the regime's force projection capacity.[13]

8.3 The Structural Logic: Why Engagement Feeds the Predator

The engagement thesis rests on a flawed analogy with China and Vietnam. In those cases, ruling parties maintained state control while permitting market forces to generate a commercial class whose interests could eventually diverge from the party's. In the Islamic Republic, no such independent commercial class exists to be liberalised. The IRGC and *bonyad* conglomerates control between 25% and 40% of Iranian GDP and dominate every economically significant sector. The private entrepreneurs who would form the constituency for liberalisation have been systematically displaced from markets they cannot compete in on political terms.[14]

Economic engagement with the Islamic Republic does not strengthen civil society; it strengthens the praetorian apparatus that destroyed civil society. Any foreign investment entering Iran on terms acceptable to the gatekeepers is, by definition, investment serving the gatekeepers' interests. The engagement thesis proposes to rescue the victims of a burning building by providing the arsonist with better fuel.

8.4 The Resistance Economy as Sanctioned Monopoly

The Islamic Republic's strategic response to economic pressure is the "Resistance Economy" (*Eqtesad-e Moqavemat*): stripped of ideological packaging, the codification of a commercial monopoly.[15] When legal trade channels are closed, IRGC smuggling networks and *bonyad*-affiliated trading companies acquire a monopoly on imports, extracting the full consumer surplus from a captive market. The regime operates a system in which sanctions-generated scarcity is the primary source of the IRGC's commercial revenue. Removing external friction from this system does not liberalise it; it provides additional caloric intake to fuel domestic predation and extend the period over which the autophagic consumption of the civilisational substrate can continue.

The January 2026 Massacre makes the engagement argument definitively obsolete. One does not propose commerce as the remedy for eliminationism; one does not suggest that the entity responsible for incinerating a mosque sheltering the wounded will be moderated by export credits. The empirical threshold at which the engagement hypothesis loses not merely

credibility but moral seriousness has been crossed.

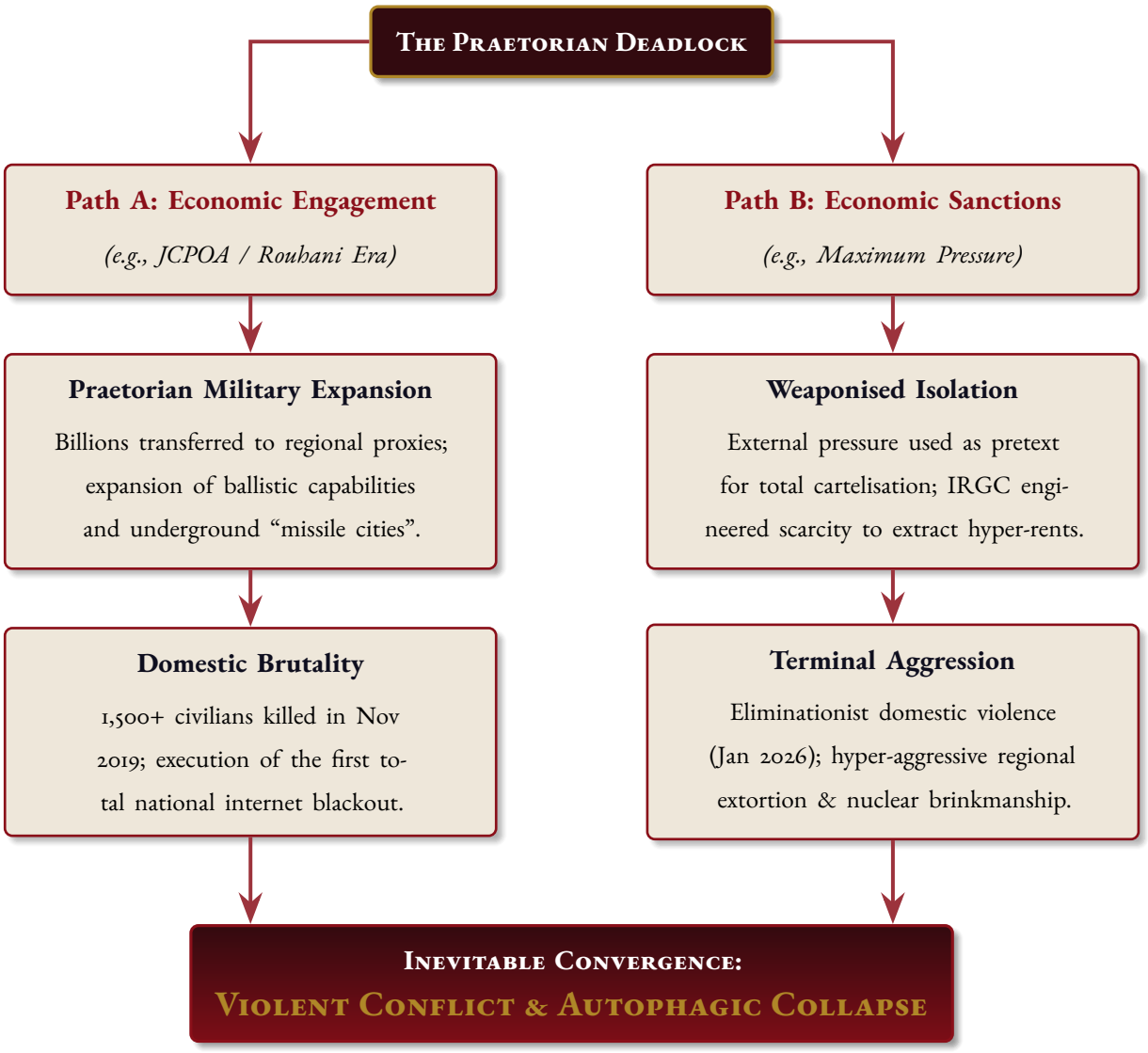
8.5 The Praetorian Deadlock: Convergence on Conflict

The regime presents Western policymakers and domestic reformists with a manufactured binary: economic engagement or economic sanctions. Praxeological analysis, however, reveals this to be a structural deadlock where both pathways inevitably converge on the same terminal outcomes: totalitarian expansion, violent conflict, and domestic eliminationism.

The illusion of the engagement path was definitively shattered during the administration of Hassan Rouhani and the JCPOA era (2015–2018). The unfrozen billions and export revenues did not empower a liberalising middle class; they were structurally captured by the praetorian elite. This capital injection directly financed the aggressive expansion of the IRGC's regional proxy network, accelerated the development of ballistic missiles, and funded the construction of subterranean "missile cities" (*shahr-e mooshaki*).[16] Domestically, this ostensibly "moderate" era birthed the November 2019 massacre—in which an estimated 1,500 Iranians were slaughtered in the streets—executed under the cover of the Islamic Republic's first total national internet blackout.[17]

Conversely, when facing comprehensive sanctions, the regime defaults to the "Resistance Economy"—which is merely ideological camouflage for total cartelisation. The state does not concede; it uses external pressure as a pretext to complete its cannibalisation of the domestic economy. The regime deliberately orchestrates the starvation of the non-connected population to consolidate a pure mafia state, where the IRGC monopolises all illicit supply chains, extracts hyper-rents from manufactured scarcity, and responds to the resulting desperation with eliminationist violence and aggressive regional extortion.[18]

The predator does not change its nature based on its caloric intake; it merely adjusts its method of hunting.


The Praetorian Deadlock
Path A: Economic Engagement
(e.g., JCPOA / Rouhani Era)
Path B: Economic Sanctions
(e.g., Maximum Pressure)
Praetorian Military Expansion
Billions transferred to regional proxies; expansion of ballistic capabilities and underground "missile cities".
Weaponised Isolation
External pressure used as pretext for total cartelisation; IRGC engineered scarcity to extract hyper-rents.
Domestic Brutality
1,500+ civilians killed in Nov 2019; execution of the first total national internet blackout.
Terminal Aggression
Eliminationist domestic violence (Jan 2026); hyper-aggressive regional extortion & nuclear brinkmanship.
Inevitable Convergence:
Violent Conflict & Autophagic Collapse

CHAPTER 9

The Non-Aggression Principle as Shield for Mass Murder

The invocation of the Non-Aggression Principle as a philosophical shield protecting the Islamic Republic from external force rests on a fundamental category error. The NAP prohibits the initiation of force against persons and property. The Islamic Republic has been continuously initiating force against approximately 90 million Iranians since February 1979. External force directed at dismantling the initiating apparatus is not an initiation of force under the NAP; it is the termination of one. Those who invoke the NAP to protect the Islamic Republic from the consequences of its forty-seven-year continuous initiation of force have not applied the principle; they have betrayed it.

9.1 The Objection from Libertarian Non-Interventionism

The most philosophically sophisticated objection to the abolitionist case comes from libertarians who argue that the Non-Aggression Principle, consistently applied to relations between political communities, prohibits the external military force necessary to dismantle the Islamic Republic. The argument proceeds as follows: the NAP prohibits the initiation of force against any individual or community that has not itself initiated force against the actor. Iran is a territorial state. The territory of Iran and its people have not initiated force against the United States, Israel, or any other external actor. Therefore, military action against Iran violates the NAP.[19] This argument is seriously made by serious people. Its logical structure is valid; its premises are false.

9.2 The Category Error: The State Is Not the People

The foundational error in the non-interventionist application of the NAP to Iran is the conflation of the Iranian state with the Iranian people—treating the Islamic Republic as if it were a community of individuals possessing rights of territorial inviolability, rather than an occupying apparatus that continuously violates the rights of the individuals it controls.[20]

The NAP prohibits the initiation of force against *individuals*. A government that acquires and maintains its power through the continuous initiation of force against the individuals

within its territory does not possess the territorial sovereignty that would make external intervention a NAP violation. The Islamic Republic's relationship to Iranian territory is the relationship of an occupying force to a captive population—the structure that, in the analysis of Part I, renders the Iranian citizen *Homo Sacer* rather than a citizen possessing rights the state exists to protect.

9.3 The Ongoing Initiation: Who Is the Aggressor?

The NAP prohibits the *initiation* of force. The Islamic Republic has been continuously initiating force against the persons and property of the Iranian population since February 1979. This is not a historical grievance but an ongoing, daily, active process. Every Iranian taxed without consent, every woman compelled under criminal penalty to wear a headscarf, every prisoner held in solitary confinement for peaceful protest, every medical worker executed in a hospital corridor in January 2026 is subject to an ongoing NAP violation.

Defensive force against an ongoing aggressor is not an initiation of force under the NAP; it is the *termination* of one. The non-interventionist who applies the NAP to prohibit external force against the Islamic Republic while ignoring the regime's ongoing force against the population has inverted the principle's application: they have protected the aggressor while abandoning the victim. The January 2026 Massacre did not create a new argument; it made the existing argument impossible to evade.

9.4 Rothbard on Defensive Revolution and Third-Party Assistance

The Rothbardian framework not only permits but logically requires the provision of assistance to populations resisting state aggression. Rothbard acknowledges that "when a State has been governed in a particularly tyrannous manner, where people have been robbed and tyrannized for years, then surely the citizens have the right to rise up and overthrow the State."[21] The logical extension is immediate: if the material conditions necessary for that overthrow can only be provided by external actors, then the provision of that assistance is not an initiation of force. It is assistance to victims of ongoing aggression in exercising their acknowledged right to defensive force. The same Self-Ownership axiom that grounds the right to resist grounds the right to receive assistance in resisting, when the resistance requires resources beyond what the isolated victim can provide.

The February 2026 strikes were not an American or Israeli war against Iran. They were a military intervention in an ongoing crime scene to disable the instruments of ongoing eliminationism against a civilian population. The analytical distinction is not semantic; it is the difference between aggression and defence, a distinction the NAP exists precisely to enforce.

The Non-Aggression Principle is not a philosophical arrangement whereby the strong may commit aggression without restraint provided they do so continuously enough that the aggression becomes background. It is a principle protecting persons from the initiation of force and requiring defensive force in response to ongoing initiated aggression. Those who invoke the NAP to protect the Islamic Republic from the consequences of forty-seven years of continuous initiation of force against 90 million people—and from accountability for the January 2026 Massacre in which between 30,000 and 36,500 of those people were killed in eleven days—have not applied the NAP. They have inverted it. They have made it a shield for mass murder, and in doing so, they have disqualified it from the serious consideration it otherwise deserves.

Notes

[1]For the classic, though historically and legally flawed, articulation of this thesis, see Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2003). For the rigorous historical correctives that dismantle the "CIA coup" myth and document Mossadegh's domestic unpopularity and unconstitutional actions, see Darioush Bayandor, *Iran and the CIA: The Fall of Mosaddeq Revisited* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Ray Takeyh, *The Last Shah: America, Iran, and the Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

[2]Mossadegh's demand for emergency plenary powers in July 1952, which led to his brief resignation and return following the 30 Tir uprising, effectively neutered the legislative branch. By early 1953, he was governing almost entirely by decree. Abbas Milani, *The Shah* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 175–190. Takeyh, *The Last Shah*, pp. 95–125, provides the most thorough recent reconstruction of Mossadegh's authoritarianism, drawing on newly declassified British and American archival material.

[3]Takeyh, *The Last Shah*, pp. 115–120. The dissolution referendum of 3–10 August 1953 has been described by Bayandor as one of the most structurally rigged electoral exercises in modern Middle Eastern history. Bayandor, *Iran and the CIA*, pp. 95–110.

[4]Bayandor's meticulous reconstruction of the August events demonstrates conclusively that the critical mass of street demonstrations on August 19th—which ultimately toppled Mossadegh—occurred after the CIA network had effectively collapsed and without Roosevelt's direct coordination. It was a domestic implosion driven by indigenous Iranian actors whose motivations were internal to Iranian politics. Bayandor, *Iran and the CIA*, pp. 125–165. To attribute Mossadegh's fall primarily to a few hundred thousand dollars disbursed by Kermit Roosevelt is to strip the Iranian people of their historical agency and to ignore the profound domestic revulsion that Mossadegh's dictatorial overreach and economic incompetence had generated.

[5]Mossadegh's refusal of the World Bank's interim administration proposal—which would have preserved nationalisation in principle while maintaining production—is documented in Takeyh, *The Last Shah*, pp. 70–92. The economic consequences of total oil revenue cessation for a state whose fiscal architecture was built around petroleum receipts were catastrophic: Mossadegh responded with money printing and asset confiscation, the predictable inflation and capital flight following directly from the Austrian analysis of monetary expansion under political uncertainty.

[6]The Shah's modernisation programme—the White Revolution (*Enghelab-e Sefid*), launched in 1963 with a six-point reform programme encompassing land reform, female suffrage, nationalisation of forests, factory profit-sharing, literacy corps, and health corps—is documented in Milani, *The Shah*, pp. 239–280. The Pahlavi state's economic record—annual GDP growth averaging approximately 10% in real terms through the 1960s and 1970s—stands in sharp contrast to the Islamic Republic's fifty-year stagnation documented in Part II. The clerical opposition to the White Revolution was not theological in origin; the senior ayatollahs who opposed it,

including Khomeini, were explicitly responding to land reform that reduced clerical endowment (*waqf*) holdings and female suffrage that they characterised as apostasy from divine order.

[7] The historiographical problem of the "privileged starting point" in narratives of political grievance is analysed in Paul Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 64–74. The selection of a historical starting point determines the moral conclusions drawn, making it a disguised form of normative argument. In 1907, Britain and Russia divided Iran into spheres of influence. In 1941, both powers jointly invaded Iran, deposed Reza Shah, and occupied the country—an intervention producing far greater direct political disruption than 1953. If historical grievance against Western intervention explains Islamic Republic foreign policy, why is American presence the primary target rather than British and Russian?

[8] Khomeini explicitly rejected Iranian nationalism as a form of *asabiyya* (tribal solidarity) incompatible with the universalism of Islam. His declared constituency was the *Ummah*. The universalism of the project is structurally incompatible with the grievance-nationalism reading of 1953. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, pp. 91–105. Khomeini's *Kashf al-Asrar* [The Unveiling of Secrets] (Qom: Chapkhaneh-ye Elmi, 1942)—written eleven years before the Mossadegh crisis—argues systematically that Western influence over Muslim-majority countries constitutes a violation of the divine order, establishing the anti-Western theological position a decade before 1953 could have generated any grievance to institutionalise.

[9] Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, pp. 55–80. The 1953 crisis added, at most, rhetorical flavour to a pre-existing theological condemnation rooted in categories that antedate any specific American action. To claim that removing the historical grievance would remove the condemnation is to fundamentally misread the logic of the argument: the condemnation precedes the grievance and would persist without it. When the Obama administration officially acknowledged the 1953 "coup" as an accommodation toward Tehran, it produced no discernible change in the Islamic Republic's strategic posture—the most decisive empirical test of the engagement thesis's predictions that one could devise.

[10] Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), pp. 148–172. Khomeini described the seizure as a "second revolution," framing it entirely in terms of the struggle against *Estekbar-e Jahani* (global arrogance). The *Sodur-e Enqelab* doctrine—the Export of the Islamic Revolution, articulated in Najaf in 1970—represents the offensive ideological programme whose subsequent implementation through the founding and funding of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hizbullah, and Hamas is not a strategic response to American sanctions or historical slights but the execution of an ideological blueprint drafted before the revolution succeeded.

[11] The libertarian non-interventionist position is articulated in Ron Paul, *A Foreign Policy of Freedom* (Lake Jackson, TX: Foundation for Freedom and Constitutional Government, 2007). The free-trade pacifism of Richard Cobden and John Bright—the Manchester School position that commerce dissolves political hostility—provides the philosophical foundation. The empirical claim that commercial integration produces regime moderation draws on the comparative experience of China's post-1978 partial liberalisation and Vietnam's doi moi reforms. The present chapter argues that this analogy fails precisely because the structural conditions generating liberalisation pressure in those cases do not exist in the Islamic Republic.

[12] For analysis of the JCPOA economic relief package, see Mark Dubowitz and Jonathan Schanzer, *After the JCPOA* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2015); and Salehi-Isfahani, "Iran's Economy in the Shadow of Sanctions," pp. 11–36.

[13] Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, "The Economic Cost of the JCPOA for Iran," *Middle East Journal* 70, no. 2 (2016): 171–187. The benefits' failure to reach ordinary Iranians reflected the structural capture of the Iranian economy by the praetorian class documented in Chapter 3. IRGC budget allocations expanded by an estimated 40% during the JCPOA relief period, with the additional resources directed primarily to Quds Force operations in Syria (estimated annual cost $6 billion), Lebanon ($700 million), and Yemen ($300 million). The engagement thesis

predicted civilian economic benefits; the actual outcome was praetorian military expansion.

[14] Maloney, *Iran's Political Economy*, pp. 230–270. The structural elimination of an independent commercial class distinguishes the Islamic Republic from every case in which engagement has produced liberalisation. In China, the "princelings" of the Communist Party developed commercial interests independent of—and sometimes in tension with—the party-state. In Iran, the equivalent commercial class *is* the IRGC: its commercial interests are identical to the perpetuation of the system, not in tension with it.

[15] Fathollah-Nejad, "Iran's Economy," pp. 28–32. When legal trade channels are closed, the IRGC's smuggling networks and *bonyad*-affiliated trading companies acquire a monopoly on imports. The regime operates a system in which sanctions-generated scarcity is the *primary source* of the IRGC's commercial revenue streams: the more restricted the legal import environment, the more valuable the IRGC's extra-legal supply chains, and the more commercially dependent on the continuation of sanctions the praetorian class becomes.

[16] The IRGC Aerospace Force publicly unveiled multiple subterranean "missile cities" beginning in late 2015 and continuing through the JCPOA implementation period, confirming that the economic dividend of engagement was allocated heavily toward strategic military expansion. See Farzin Nadimi, "Iran's Ballistic Missile Arsenal is Still Growing in Size, Reach, and Accuracy," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (December 2017).

[17] The 1,500 death toll for the November 2019 protests was documented by Reuters, citing three interior ministry officials detailing orders directly from the Supreme Leader to "do whatever it takes to end it." Reuters, "Special Report: Iran's leader ordered crackdown on unrest," 23 December 2019. The unprecedented severing of the global internet via BGP route withdrawals was documented by NetBlocks, establishing the technological template later perfected in January 2026. NetBlocks, "Internet disrupted in Iran amid fuel protests in multiple cities," 15 November 2019.

[18] The claim that sanctions destroy the private sector is a reformist myth. The Islamic Republic's constitutional architecture structurally precludes a genuine private sector. Under sanctions, the IRGC intentionally weaponises economic isolation to exterminate any remaining residual independent wealth, funnelling all trade into its own smuggling networks. Scarcity is not an unintended consequence of sanctions; it is a deliberately engineered mechanism for the regime to extract maximum rents while starving the civilian host. Ali Fathollah-Nejad, "Iran's Economy: Twenty Years of Stagnation," *Middle East Journal* 72, no. 1 (2018): 11–35.

[19] The libertarian non-interventionist position is articulated in Murray N. Rothbard, "War, Peace, and the State," in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2000), pp. 115–132. Rothbard's foreign policy views, developed primarily in the context of opposing American imperial wars of expansion, have been extrapolated by some of his followers to a position of absolute non-interventionism that Rothbard himself did not consistently maintain. The present analysis argues that the non-interventionist position, when confronted with eliminationism on the scale of the January 2026 Massacre, produces conclusions incompatible with the NAP's own foundational premise.

[20] Rothbard himself argues explicitly: "The State is a gang of thieves writ large—the most immoral, grasping and unscrupulous individuals in any society." Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty*, p. 181. The implication is that the State as an institutional entity does not possess the rights of persons; rights attach to individuals, and a State that continuously violates the rights of the individuals within its territory does not thereby acquire rights against external actors that would make intervention in that territory a NAP violation.

[21] Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty*, p. 189.